

Soviet Literature

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ALEXANDER DOVZHENKO

LIFE IN BLOOM

Life in Bloom is the title of a scenario about Michurin, the great Russian horticulturist. It might have been treated as a biography, reviving, step by step, the life of the scientist, but Alexander Dovzhenko chose another course. He selected only the most outstanding and vivid episodes in Michurin's eventful life, a life so crowded with difficulties that only an exceptional man could have overcome them.

The story shows the two epochs that met in Michurin's lifetime, the old Russia and the new. It begins with Michurin in a small provincial town that couldn't appreciate a man of his gifts. Far away imperial St. Petersburg was as hostile to Michurin's experiments as the Kozlov province in which he lived.

Michurin had a boundless faith in the work he had begun and no obstacle, however formidable, could stand between him and his faith.

Dovzhenko did not take the easy way of showing Michurin, as a proud and indomitable personality towering above his environment. In avoiding this Dovzhenko displayed the wisdom of the true artist.

Despite the bold daring of his experimentation Michurin finds people to share his views and give him support. His supporters are obscure people. Terenty, the illiterate old watchman intuitively sensed Michurin's greatness and played an important role in the history of Michurin's discoveries. Fyodor Kuzmich, the postman, is another simple person who understood the scope of Michurin's work and supported his old friend with all his heart and soul. Every day he brought Michurin a bundle of letters from various parts of the world, and his visits were a testimony to Michurin's fame in foreign lands long before he won recognition in his own.

The portrait of Michurin's wife Alexandra Vassilyevna is excellently drawn. She was an ordinary Russian woman who did not quite realize the importance of what her husband was doing. She spent her whole life pottering about in the garden, not always understanding her husband, oftentimes scolding him because they were poor and because their children sometimes knew the meaning of hunger.

She loved her husband dearly and dedicated her life to his cause. She believed in God and went to church regularly and when Christopher, the priest, told her that

what her husband was doing was sinful and would bring him damnation, Alexandra Vassilyevna trembled at this terrible accusation.

The story merely touches on Alexandra Vassilyevna's inner drama but we are nevertheless conscious of its profundity and the portrait of this fine Russian woman, who was Michurin's principal moral support, is unfolded in all its spiritual beauty. Her moral suffering, however, affected her health and the good woman died long before her husband. The husband and wife, worn out but not defeated by life's struggle, full of tenderness and love, take leave of each other for the last time. As he sits by the bedside of his dying wife, holding a hand roughened by long years of toil, Michurin's thoughts go back to the springtime of their life. He sees them both walking in a lovely garden, full of naive happiness, their hands touching the branches of the blossoming apple trees as they pass. . . Such a memory coming in life's last hour, shows that although life had not been kind to these two people, they had known real happiness.

The death of Alexandra Vassilyevna was a terrible blow to Michurin. His work helped to quieten the pain of his loss. Often at night he wept, but by day he toiled in the garden. He grew more reticent than before. And his devotion to the garden that had always filled his life now became his sole obsession.

In 1917 a new epoch dawned both for Michurin and for all Russia. The civil war passed over his garden like a storm. Here and there branches were broken but the garden remained and the goal to which Michurin had been aspiring all his life was now within reach.

Now the scientist had attained a degree of mental poise that is given to very few people. Though old and feeble his mind preserved its youthful vigour. His speech acquired the clarity and conciseness of aphorism. Dovzhenko makes this wisdom of Michurin's light up his declining years like the rays of the setting sun.

On the occasion of his jubilee in 1934 Michurin realized at last how greatly his influence had grown. He saw that the whole country venerated him. He learned that his old home town Kozlov, would from now on bear his name. At the jubilee meeting held in

his honour in the local theatre he was greeted by delegations from all parts of the Soviet Union.

The jubilee was his apotheosis. Shortly after the event Michurin passed away, like a candle that has burned to the end. He had drained utterly the powers nature had given him, and not a single precious drop had been wasted.

Michurin stopped outside a door marked "Revcom".¹

"Halt!" said the sentry. "There's a meeting going on."

"A meeting!" snorted Michurin. "They've only just entered town and they're holding meetings already. That's no good! I didn't expect it of them."

At that moment the door opened and a member of the Revcom poked out his head and said: "Comrade, there's a meeting in here."

When Michurin entered the room where the Revcom was in session everyone rose. (They often recalled the incident and laughed at the memory of how they had all jumped to their feet like schoolboys when this old man appeared. Was there really some compelling and imperative quality about him?)

They were all very young and their bearing bespoke courage and an indomitable desire to do good.

The only one present who did not rise was Stepan Ryabov. He was a youth of great integrity and devotion to the revolutionary cause, but he was ill-tempered, or rather it was not so much bad temper as the fact that the poverty and misery his whole class had had to endure for some two or three hundred years had so embittered him that he resented the very sight of anyone decently dressed. He was not a local man and had not heard of Michurin. The old man looked like an enemy to him. Michurin, on his part, seeing that he remained seated, jumped to the conclusion that he must be the chairman and sized him up as one of those young louts who had stolen apples from his orchard. He felt somewhat put out.

"Good day, friends. I am Michurin."

"Welcome, Comrade Professor," chorused the Revcom members.

"What do you want?" Ryabov demanded.

"In the first place I have come to congratulate you on the victory of the... er... revolution and... er youth. Secondly, I have a request to make," Michurin frowned and turned to address himself directly to Ryabov. "I want you to tell me frankly: will you protect my nursery or not?"

At this point Michurin suddenly felt so furious with himself for making such a poor beginning that he actually banged his stick on the floor. No, this was nothing at all like the speech he had intended to make, the one and only time in his life to a committee of

Below we publish an excerpt from A. Dovzhenko's scenario, dealing with the birth of the new Soviet world, of Michurin's acquaintance with the young builders of the Soviet state, of his disputes with the bookish scholar Kartashev, and of the visit which Mikhail Kalinin, President of the Soviet Republic, paid to Michurin's nursery.

victorious revolutionaries. A wealth of truly splendid, stirring words about the majesty of the struggle, about the new world and the liberation of mankind surged within him. He was a materialist dialectician, for a genuine understanding of nature inevitably leads to dialectics. He had intended to say many things of profound interest to the battle-scarred Communists. And now this crude youngster Ryabov had spoiled his whole speech. He could not, in fact, see any battle-scarred Communists either. Everything was so different from what he had expected. They were all callow-looking, beardless youths. It was obvious that none of them had been in exile, none had worn prisoners' fetters.

"Be so kind as to answer my question," he said at last.

"Certainly," several of them replied at once.

"It all depends who we're supposed to protect the nursery for," growled Ryabov. "Who do you think you are anyway. Coming here all dressed up!"

"Comrade Ryabov, I call you to order," a stern voice broke in. Michurin glanced around and saw a light-haired, bronze-faced young man in the plain leather jacket. His appearance was typical of these strong resolute young men who were destined to go down in history as the generation of victors. It was Pavel Sinitsyn, the chairman of the Regional Revolutionary Committee.

"Won't you sit down, Ivan Vladimirovich," he invited Michurin.

"No, excuse me," said Michurin turning back to Ryabov, "I have survived three tsars and, as you see, have grown old and bowed. I've spent forty-four years in that garden of mine."

"So now you don't want to give it up, eh?" Ryabov sneered.

"Ryabov!!!"

"I refuse to talk to a fool," Michurin lost his temper and turned to Sinitsyn. "I planted that garden on a vacant lot in search for new ways of producing better fruits for Russia. I didn't read Darwin and Timiryazev until late in life and I made thousands of mistakes in my quest for truth. Today I no longer care whether the nursery will be mine or not. What is important to me is to preserve it for the nation. You understand? And that's why I put on a frock-coat for the first time in forty years! And not for you, young man!" He glanced angrily at Ryabov.

"Don't get angry, Ivan Vladimirovich," the chairman of the Revolutionary Committee

¹ Revolutionary Committee.

said soothingly, "And don't pay any attention to him. He has no manners, but he's a good lad. Why, he'll be the first to preserve your nursery for Socialism."

"A lot you understand about Socialism," grumbled Michurin.

"Sure, you'll teach us, sir. Comrades, what sort of talk is this!" Ryabov flared up.

"Let the man have his say!" Sinitsyn broke in.

"The people must learn to love work and stop regarding it as slaves do. . . ."

"Quite right!"

" . . . So that they will not try to avoid physical labour. God forbid. Only slaves and parasites hate physical work, you'd better make a note of that, gentlemen. . . Here, try these."

And Michurin began to hand out magnificent apples to the members of the Revcom, producing them like a conjurer from the deep pockets of his frock-coat.

Ryabov, too, got an apple. He looked embarrassed as he took it, for he had expected Michurin to ignore him.

"Thank you, Ivan Vladimirovich," said Sinitsyn, smiling and admiring the apple. "Ryabov, write out an order for the protection of the nursery and for it to obtain supplies as a state institution."

"Thank you," said Michurin, rising. "I accept. And by the way, you might send me some help while you are at it."

"You will get help, too. Everything. And everything is going to be quite different from now on. I'll come and work for you myself as soon as we get things going," said Sinitsyn, walking over to Michurin.

"That's brave of you," smiled Michurin.

"Yes. You see I am an old acquaintance of yours, Ivan Vladimirovich. I have climbed your apple trees more than once."

"Ah, so it was you?"

"Yes. Terenty caught me once. . . I had tea at your house."

"So that means the end of my garden," said Michurin.

Everyone laughed.

"Don't worry, Ivan Vladimirovich. That was a long time ago and I learned my lesson from you."

"Where have you been all the time?"

"Oh, that's a long story. Thanks, Ryabov. Here is the order issued in the name of the Revolution. It will procure you food and a buggy."

"A buggy too! Gentlemen, er . . . Comrades. This is wonderful! Splendid. Thank you. Good afternoon."

"Don't rush off like that. Give us a little lecture about your work."

"A lecture? Nonsense. Better send you some apples. There's no sense in short talk and I've no time for a long one. Neither have you for that matter. The shooting is still going on. So long, I must be off."

The civil war passed over like a spring thunderstorm and rolled on southwards to the Ukraine and the Kuban.

That spring Ryabov came to see Michurin. He wore a shabby army uniform and an old faded student's cap. Michurin was working in the garden.

"What do you want?"

"How do you do."

"What is it?"

"I'm Ryabov."

"Ah . . . Ryabov. What Ryabov?"

"Have a look. I'm the regional horticultural instructor."

"What's your first name?"

"Stepan. And my patronymic. . . ."

"You'll get along here without a patronymic. Instructor, you say?"

"Yes."

"H'm. Well, go ahead and instruct. What are you standing there for? Take a spade."

"Sure," said Ryabov and taking the spade from Michurin's hands began to dig the bed. "But I didn't come here to instruct you. I came to learn."

"Then don't stand there talking nonsense."

"All right then, but listen to me, please. Sometimes it's good for old folks to listen. In the first place, I want to see the garden. And secondly, let me tell you right now: all this," said Ryabov, pointing to the garden with a grin, "is no good!"

"What do you mean!" shouted Michurin.

"Who the devil do you think you are?"

"It's all amateurish," said Ryabov.

"What?"

"Please don't get excited. It's ridiculous. It's small stuff. It's got to be run on a state scale. See what I mean? Now I've got a subsidy for you, 250,000 rubles. There!"

"How much?" Michurin backed away in horror from the paper Ryabov was holding out to him. "You're out of your mind! How on earth will I be able to account for all that money. I'll get muddled up with the bookkeeping and land in jail before I know it."

"Don't worry."

"Take it back! You hear! Take it back at once! What shall we do with it? Why, that's capital!"

Ryabov fingered his unkempt forelock and stared into the distance.

"We'll take the monastery grounds. That's one. We'll plant 130,000 trees this spring, two. A laboratory, three! An exhibition, four! Why, it won't be enough!" And Ryabov burst out laughing.

"Don't make such a noise! The devil take you."

"Ivan Vladimirovich, wait. I'm a greedy specimen. The way I figure it a million wouldn't be enough. Don't worry, I'll get it if I have to use my teeth. We'll make history with all this. I've written to Lenin already!"

Michurin scowled at the newcomer, barely able to conceal the joy that had awakened within him.

In the year one thousand nine hundred and twenty-two when the problem of rehabilitating Soviet agriculture was discussed at a meeting of the Council of People's Commissars in the Kremlin, Lenin remembered Michurin.

"You know who used to tell me a great deal about Michurin when I was in Switzerland? Bakunin. It appears they worked together on the railways at one time. He is a very remarkable man, comrades. Have any of you read Cirwood's *Regenerated Earth* by

any change? I would advise you to read it. There is a translation by Timiryazev. Michurin, comrades, is an exceptional phenomenon. His experiments in evolving new plants are of tremendous importance for the state, tremendous. We shall have to summon him to the Council of People's Commissars for a report!"

A few days later Lenin was informed that Michurin had refused to come and report to the Council.

Lenin smiled. "You see, didn't I tell you he was a most interesting man? We must do everything to put his work on the proper footing."

There was a great to-do in the Kozlov Executive Committee. They did not know what on earth to do with the obstinate old man.

Stepan Ryabov was pale and distraught. He paced up and down the office brandishing his fists at an imaginary opponent.

"Refused to go. Have you ever heard of anything like it?"

"You don't say!"

"It's a fact!"

"Enough to drive you crazy."

"Well, I must say!"

"Comrades!"

"What on earth are we going to do? I arranged an exhibition and wrote memoranda to Sovnarkom¹ asking to have the nursery put on a state footing, and..."

"That's cooked it! That's a scientist for you! I'd show those scientists!"

"He's not well. He's sick."

"Wait. Wait. Wait. Shhh! He's coming!"

Michurin entered. One glance at his pupils and superiors was enough to tell him what was amiss.

He was indeed out of sorts. But his ailment was not only physical. He was in the midst of some extremely important experiments which demanded the greatest attention and a thorough knowledge of the already completed stages of the work. He could not stop the process or entrust the observation to anyone else. All those around him were so young. And after having been in mental torment for three days over his tragical inability to go and meet the great man, having tried a hundred times over to solve the painful problem of whether he had the right to risk his life's work, he could only give disjointed, incoherent answers to the scandalized youngsters.

"Ivan Vladimirovich!"

"No, Comrades."

"What?"

"I know. You want me to go to Lenin. No."

"But do you realize what you are saying?"

"Yes."

"But he's waiting for you!"

"Listen, don't try to teach me."

"But it's Lenin, and he's waiting for you."

"Nonsense, he isn't waiting," said Michurin softly as if Lenin were right there in the next room and he, Michurin, feared to disturb him. "It's just childish imagination. You think he has nothing else to do but worry about my hybrids. Why, he has a whole country as big as almost half of the world

to look after. The Revolution! He hasn't time to breathe. How can I go to him and take up his valuable time? You youngsters don't know what you're talking about. He must have accidentally remembered me and out of politeness, being a nice man, he wrote and asked me to drop in and see him. You have to understand these things. Can't you just see me arriving: 'good afternoon, I'm from Kozlov. Hybrids, you know...' See what I mean? My job is to dig the garden, and not to go hobnobbing with Sovnarkoms. Why, think of it... And then, you know... No, no. You'd better go, Ryabov, and you, Meshkov. Go to Moscow and arrange a report in the Academy there for the People's Commissar of Agriculture. That will be plenty. And no more of this nonsense about going to Lenin. I won't have it."

It was evening. Michurin was sitting in his study among his birds and plants. His health had taken a turn for the worse. Meshkov was writing a letter at his dictation.

"Dear Comrade Lenin! I would be happy to come and see you, but unfortunately I am unable to do so. It is too late. I am already old and feeble and there is still so much to be done that I dare not tear myself away. I am detained by my modest work in the garden which has engaged my attention for nearly half a century now. And, then, I am not much good at making reports: my place is in the garden and not in the rostrum. I wish you health and success.

I invite you to come to my garden to rest and meditate on the future of mankind. Yours, Michurin."

They never met.

The winter of 1924 was unusually severe. There was a great deal of snow and the frost was fiercer than it had ever been. Blizzards raged over the plains, travellers froze by the wayside and birds froze on the wing.

It was as if a foreboding of evil had paralyzed our land.

Clouds of vapour rose like smoke from the cracks in the frozen rivers. Trees split in the forests. Gardens perished. Michurin lay ill in his snowbound cottage. Ryabov, the chairman of the district land department, took care of the nursery himself, spending nights in the laboratory. What was to be done? How was he to save the nursery for which he was responsible to Lenin himself? How was he to safeguard Michurin's garden which had come to mean so much to him during the past few years, the garden in which he had matured spiritually, learning from this grumpy old man and putting all his energy and ability into helping him in every possible way.

"But there are frost-hardy hybrids in the garden, are there not?"

"Yes, but there is a limit to everything. The experiments did not provide for frosts like these. This is not a frost, it is a calamity."

"We'll hold out all right."

"But the temperature is expected to drop still further. What is to be done? How can we save the situation?"

"We'll bury at least a dozen young saplings and a bed of seedlings as deep under the snow

¹ Council of People's Commissars.

as possible. And cover them up with straw and smoke!"

"Have you consulted the boss?"

"He's sleeping."

"Okay, let's go."

"Comrades," said Ryabov grimly, taking up a spade. "don't spare anything. The fence, the barn—tear everything down. Get all the straw you can find. This has got to be saved. We aren't Communists if we can't do it!"

"Don't worry, Stepan Mikhailovich," Terenty assured him. "It's a fierce frost and it'll make me ferocious. I'd burn my last shirt let alone the barn!"

And so bonfires were lit in Michurin's orchard. The thick, heavy smoke spread among the hoary trees and swallowed them up. Ryabov, Meshkov, Dedushkin, Terenty and a dozen others worked with the youngest and most valuable trees, covering them with a thick blanket of snow.

"Some frost! It burns like fire!"

"Fire is the word. You won't find frosts like these anywhere in the world," grumbled Terenty, "the scientists ought to invent some way of fighting them. It's a shame. They're drawing salaries for nothing. Look at this poor frozen bird lying here."

Suddenly Michurin appeared coming from the direction of the house. He walked quickly and seemed much agitated. No one had ever seen him in such a state before. He was hatless and so pale that Ryabov was frightened.

"Ivan Vladimirovich, what's the matter? Didn't you promise me not to go out in the cold?"

Michurin halted in his tracks. He held his hat in trembling hands.

"Ivan Vladi. . ."

"Bare your heads! Lenin is dead!"

"Lenin!" the cry broke from them like a groan.

"Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin has died in Gorki," he said in low distinct tones.

They all removed their caps. Terenty crossed himself in the Russian fashion.

Bonfires crackled all over the land and the people's tears watered the cold, bereaved Soviet earth. Factory sirens moaned. The whole world seemed to be frozen and still.

"Lenin!" groaned Michurin hoarsely. "In seven years he brought more good to mankind than all the great men of the world in ten centuries."

"Lenin . . . Vladimir Ilyich," Sinitsyn and Ryabov whispered softly.

For one long-unforgettable moment they were silent.

"Nature doesn't spare anyone. Now she has taken him . . . Lenin," Michurin sighed deeply and looked around wrathfully at the snowbound earth. "There is war, comrades, war going on everywhere. Cold and death against warmth and reason. . . Listen to me," Michurin rose to his full height. "In honour of the great and immortal man who has given our country a worthy place in history, I order you to stop this work!"

With that Michurin put on his cap. His face grew grim and harsh as though he was about to plunge into battle.

His followers stared at him in amazement.

"Let this be a test," said Michurin. "Na-

ture is against us. We too shall declare open war on her, for Lenin's sake. He made us what we are. Let us put our work to the test, we shall see whether we are Bolsheviks or not. Put out the fires. Let the frost do its worst."

The snow fell. Soon everything was covered with a white blanket—the orchard and the bonfires, and the little house in the garden.

Spring came. The frosts had taken a heavy toll of the gardens and orchards in central Russia. Michurin's orchard suffered too. But heavy though the losses were, the frost helped Michurin to make important discoveries. Under one of the frozen pear trees they discovered a real miracle: a grapevine untouched by the frost.

Many different hybrids withstood the frost and bore fruit.

Work seethed in the orchard. Girls and Young Pioneers worked busily with spade and rake. Bees hummed in the blossoming trees, buzzing busily amongst the paper bags that had been placed over the pollenized flowers.

Michurin sat on a folding chair beside a sapling bending over like a physician over an ailing child. In his hand he held a magnifying glass. The sapling was a hybrid, a new type of rowan tree. Michurin alone could see the struggle of the genes that was going on in the new tree, the product of two, a bride and groom whom he had "paired".

"Not taking to each other very well, are you?" he murmured to the tree. "Scrapping and fighting? Never mind, my young couple. You'll learn to love one another soon. . . Aha, here's another new feature coming out. Good. In six years or so I'll have you reconciled. You'll be large and luscious. You'll go to the north and brighten people's lives. Little children will love you and steal you and eat you. Goodness gracious, how wonderful!"

Michurin raised his face to the sun and closed his eyes with a smile of contentment as though he was envisioning the triumphant march of his handiwork to northern climes.

At that point a boat drew in to the river bank, and a group of young people entered the orchard. With them was Professor Kartashev.

"In this secluded corner I spent two years, living like a recluse," he said to the students with a shade of self-satisfaction as he surveyed the garden. "Yes. I did a lot of work here making a critical analysis and building the theoretical foundation for Michurin's rather chaotic empirical structure."

"Who's that talking nonsense?" broke in Michurin's voice. "Terenty, who's there? Isn't it Professor Kartashev?"

"Quite right, Ivan Vladimirovich," Terenty replied.

"How do you do, Ivan Vladimirovich," called Kartashev in some embarrassment. "Here we are."

"You've come here with your students for practical work?" said Terenty and observing the students around him, he said to them. "Yes, practice is a great thing. Comrade Engels wrote in his books that theo-



Michurin in his garden

try without practice is just the same as a horse without a bridle. That's right?" And Terenty shook his forefinger wisely.

The students laughed.

Some of them had already taken off their shirts. Others were sprawled lazily on the grass marring the austerity of the Michurin orchard.

Michurin came down the garden path toward the students. His approach augured ill for both the students and their professor. Kartashev went forward to meet him.

"Are these your youngsters?" he inquired softly of Kartashev eyeing the students with disapproval.

"Er, I don't quite . . ." faltered the puzzled professor.

Michurin marched over to the students. "I'm Michurin. Get up! Why didn't you greet me? Professor Kartashev, why have your students not greeted me?"

"M'm. . . I should think that is their own affair."

"No, that is your affair. And what's more, I do not believe your answer is sincere. You are merely encouraging their bad manners. Be so kind as to put on your clothes," Michurin ordered the students.

"What pettiness, chaps," one freckled-faced student in shorts was heard to remark.

"I insist upon a respectable appearance," said Michurin quietly but distinctly. "When shall we cease to ignore appearances? Why and in the name of what should it be ignored? Why must our new life be vulgarized by a lack of courtesy? When shall we finally realize that courtesy and politeness have a moral foundation?"

"But what do you see bad in us? What do you want of us?"

"I want our young men to possess a synthesis of all the finest qualities!"

"That depends on how you look at it," objected the freckled-faced student.

"What did you say?"

Michurin turned to Kartashev and taking him aside said in a tone of polite insistence: "Be so kind as to take these people away from here at once."

Kartashev was taken aback. "But, Ivan Vladimirovich, the students have been sent to you from the People's Commissariat of Agriculture for practical work!" The professor spoke the last words in a whisper.

"These are not students. You are deceiving me," said Michurin.

"How can you say such a thing?"

"Yes. I know you of old. You used to hang around me with that scoundrel Christopher and the mayor, and now you come with these . . ." words failed him.

"Excuse me," whispered Kartashev, "but these are second-year students, Ivan Vladimirovich, I swear to you. You really ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Michurin approached the students again.

"Tell me, young men, if you are really students of the agricultural academy, why do I see no joy or wonder in your eyes, not to speak of reverence? Here you have come to the only orchard of its kind in the world, to the field, so to speak of many years of battles fought in the wonderful world of plants."

"It's disgusting," Terenty snapped suddenly. "If you're real students you ought to see that plainly."

"Quiet there, professor."

"Yes, sir."

"Why do you loll on the grass and munch sandwiches like a vulgar picnic party? Why, I ask you? Why are you not examining the garden, if I myself can be of no interest to you? Come over here," Michurin pointed to a student whose jaws were working.

The student stopped chewing and obeyed.

"Do you know my full name?"

"Er. . . Why do you ask?" stammered the student, looking as if he wished the earth would swallow him up.

"Lenin knew my name, but you don't. Because you are not talented. And your professor isn't talented either."

Michurin suddenly caught sight of a man squatting beside a queer-looking bush, looking from it to a drawing in the book he held in his hand. It was student Pavel Sinityn. Michurin tiptoed over to him from behind as if he were a strange bird he was afraid to scare away.

"How do you do, young man. What are you examining there?"

"Good day, Ivan Vladimirovich. Excuse me, I simply couldn't help it. I'm examining this bird-cherry and cherry hybrid. Here you have your ceropadus. Remarkable."

"What is remarkable?"

"The two upper shoots are longer and of a different thickness."

"Ah, you see, that's where the struggle comes in," said Michurin in such a soft, gentle voice that you would think the Kartashev incident had never occurred.

"The bird-cherry wildling is five years old, and we took the graft from a four-year-old tree. In this struggle between the bird-cherry and the cherry, it is the former that is winning, of course. It is stronger in the crown and lower down the cherry has the upperhand, as you see. Just a minute, haven't I met you before somewhere?"

"Oh yes, more than once. I used to steal apples from your orchard once upon a time. I remember you called me a scoundrel."

"Good lord!"

"Yes. . . And after that I was the chairman of the Revcom here. I gave you an order to protect the nursery in the name of the Revolution, if you remember."

"My dear fellow, of course I do! Goodness, how old I am getting. Would you believe it, I think of you nearly every day and here you are and I didn't recognize you. So you're studying?"

"Yes."

"Study, my dear fellow, study. There's a vast amount of work to be done. Thousands of experiments, years and years of patient labour."

"Ivan Vladimirovich, I have learned patience from you. Ever since you told me that all this is for me, remember. . ."

"Why, of course. Yes. But what are we doing? Call your comrades over! Such fine, talented youngsters. Wonderful. Goodness gracious. Comrades, this way please!"

The students and Kartashev approached. A complete transformation had come over Mi-

churin. Beaming, he moved to the next bush and seating himself on his folding chair, looked with pleasure at the bush, at the students, at Kartashev.

"Now look at this peach tree, I have been working on it for I don't know how many years and I can't do anything with it. Hundreds of seedlings every year and not a single frost-resisting hybrid. I get either an almond or a peach. What do you advise me to do?"

"But that is bound to happen, Ivan Vladimirovich. It is the law of nature," said Kartashev speaking as gently as he could and making a cautious gesture with his hand as if to stroke the lion's mane. But the lion roared nevertheless.

"You've got yourself so tied up with laws that you can't move. What do you say?" asked Michurin turning to Pavel Sinitsyn. "Keep on experimenting," replied the latter.

"I declare you a professor," said Michurin, then turning to Kartashev and pointing at Sinitsyn, added: "I entrust him with my failure. Remember, it is him the people will have to thank for the northern peach and you will build up the theoretical foundation afterwards. . . Don't take offence. I cannot help it."

"Ivan Vladimirovich, I would really prefer to talk to you alone. And I would kindly ask you not to insult me before the students."

"Tut-tut!"

"Please."

"I beg your pardon, Stepan!" Michurin called to Ryabov, "take care of the students and show them everything there is to see. I shall be busy with Evgeny Grigoryevich."

Kartashev smiled. That was the first time Michurin had called him by his name and patronymic. "Got cold feet, the old codger," he thought and straightened his shoulders.

They had not gone more than twenty steps away when the stern voice of Terenty was heard adjuring the students:

"Who told you to disperse? Stay where you are!"

Michurin glanced round.

"You have no sense of decency," Terenty was lecturing the students. "Where do you think you are? You have come to Ivan Vladimirovich's academy of miracles. You daren't breathe loudly here, and you go sniggering all over the place."

"Terenty! Come here. . . Terenty, I must say you haven't the slightest notion of how to talk to people."

"Who? Me?" repeated Terenty standing respectfully before Michurin.

"Wait. In the first place you are always poking your nose in where you shouldn't."

"Well."

"You're always interrupting and you don't give a man a chance to have his say."

"Ivan Vladi. . ."

"Silence. That won't do at all. What's more, you have a tendency to boast, yes. You're boastful and impolite to people."

"Yes, yes," muttered Terenty nodding his head and glancing with an expression of indescribable reproach from Michurin to Kartashev.

"You mustn't talk to people like that. After all, they come to us with big problems.

You have to be gentle, polite with them."

"Mmm—mhm. . ."

"Mhm," Michurin mocked. "Why did you shout at the students?"

That was more than Terenty could stand.

"Who, me? I shouted at the students?"

You were the one who shouted. You were the one who insulted the youth! Didn't like the way they were eating. Got sore because they didn't stand to attention before you. . . Nothing pleases you. . . Not even the scientists. . ."

"What scientists?"

"Why, Kartashev, here."

"Listen, Terenty, I want you to remember once and for all: I have never in my life insulted a scientist. Understand? Never!"

"Then why do you call me a professor?" Terenty said quickly in order to divert the barb from Kartashev.

"Wait, just wait."

"No, you wait."

"Terenty, don't interrupt me. My head is in a whirl as it is. What was I saying? Yes. Did I really scold the students?" Michurin looked surprised. "It seems to me I welcomed them most courteously. True, when they came crowding around me, I was slightly taken aback at first, ha! ha! ha! But afterwards when I recovered I think I spoke very politely to them. Now, Terenty, run along. . . What do you mean by eavesdropping?" he said suddenly stamping his foot as he saw a malicious smile on Kartashev's face.

"I beg your pardon."

"Terenty. Tchh-tchh-tchh! How could it have slipped my mind. Terenty go at once to the eighth bed, the eighth, and take off the screens. At once. Ah, yes. . ." turning to Kartashev and pointing politely to a ladder, "this way, please. Yes, yes. So as not to waste time, I will carry on with the pollinating while we talk and you can watch my empiricism in practice."

Michurin picked up his bag of tools and climbed up the ladder.

Professor Kartashev had no alternative but to climb the next ladder. Thus the two scientists held converse surrounded by the fragrant apple blossoms amidst the droning of the bees and the merry chatter of the orchard birds, while from the other end of the garden came the voices of the young girls singing as they worked.

They could hardly see each other through the mass of blossoms, a circumstance which made for complete candour.

Michurin: And so you are annoyed with me.

Kartashev: Yes. I ask you to show that courtesy you so insistently demand of my students.

Michurin: Ah, you scored there! Go on.

Kartashev: And now we may continue our old quarrel.

Michurin: I am busy.

Kartashev: Ivan Vladimirovich.

Michurin: An empirical structure! You said that to your students in such a tone that one might think you had brought them to Terenty and not to me.

Kartashev: Excuse me, when we in the Academy say that you are a most talented intuitive dialectician and empiricist. . .

Michurin: I don't care a hang what you say about me.

Kartashev: Just a minute. . . I want to say that I don't see anything offensive about the term. You are indeed a talented intuitive empiricist, a deductivist.

Michurin: And you are an office clerk.

Kartashev: Please be careful insulting me, we may be overheard.

Michurin: Don't worry, there are only bees here and they're too busy to listen. I had some American visitors here. They didn't pin any labels on me. They took off their hats in my garden as if they were in church, and you've brought students here that you have taught to be like yourself and that I shall never forgive you. And, these are the children of workers and peasants!

Kartashev: Why were you so rude to them?

Michurin: It's not true! I was not rude. I was severe because they are dear to me. And you? You don't care anything for them and that is why you are "kind" to them. Such kindness is only mental laziness and indifference.

Kartashev: You're wrong. They are very fond of me.

Michurin: Nonsense. It is my stern words they will remember when they are grown men and not your mellow baritone.

Kartashev: You are very bad tempered. I should not have thought that solitude in communion with nature would have embittered you so.

Michurin: Not solitude but a battle against nature and against amateurs like yourself. Why do you keep coming here? What is it that draws you here? Why am I not drawn to your stuffy, pseudo-scientific cubbyhole?

Kartashev: I honestly wished to give a scientific foundation to you. . . .

Michurin: Thank you. Others will do that for me.

Kartashev: Who?

Michurin: My pupils. Meshkov, for example, Sinitsyn, Ryabov. There are plenty of them. I feel that they are getting somewhere. Wait, they will give you something to think about, you with your herbariums mummifying nature. "Nature is eternal!" Pshaw!

Kartashev: I do not say that she is eternal. But I do say that she does not develop by leaps and bounds.

Michurin: I don't care if she doesn't. I'll do it for her.

With a sharp movement Michurin broke off a blossom.

"Do you imagine that this flower will exist forever? Nonsense. Change the environment and within a thousand years this apple tree will turn into a plum or something. I can change it in five years if you like. Ah! You don't like the suggestion. It might work, eh? Well, it does work. But suppose it doesn't? Well, then we will build the scientific foundation, and talk about the empiricist and his tricks. But these are the tricks that throw a new and dazzling light on the world. And that's why you're afraid of me. I am a threat to you.

Kartashev: You are too ambitious.

Michurin: Yes. I work by intuition. I am giving practical form to the theories of Darwin and Timiryazev and I have undertaken

a great deal. I am no nature lover. I am a despot, a creator! That's enough. The debate is over.

Kartashev: Excuse me!

Michurin: I am not interested. I am not interested. Before the Revolution you were at least more definite. . . .

Kartashev (icily): I thank you. I thought that we would speak as one scientist to another. But everything you have told me and all that vehemence and sectarian intolerance, Ivan Vladimirovich, which ignores all scientific opinion. . . .

Michurin: Not all!

Kartashev: . . . unfortunately merely confirms my opinion that all your brilliant experiments. . . of course, you are a genius. . . .

Michurin: That will do now. . . Get off that ladder!

Kartashev: How dare you talk to me like that!

Michurin: Go to hell!

Kartashev: Don't shout, someone may hear us. What are you doing? Stop it, for goodness sake.

Michurin: Get down. Or do you want me to give you a crack with this branch. . . .

Kartashev: Owl! I have been stung by a bee.

Michurin: I have no time to indulge in idle chatter among the flowers, I'm waging civil war here. Get off that ladder. Confound it, now I have forgotten to check up. . . Terenty!

"I am here," came Terenty's voice softly, close by.

The scientists looked down and were struck dumb. All the students, Meshkov, and Terenty were seated under the tree. They had evidently been there for a long time, but had not dared to stir for fear of disturbing the talk. Many of the students were busily making notes. Pavel Sinitsyn was sitting with wide-open eyes as if he were at a sensational trial.

"What do you want here?" Michurin thundered, coming down the ladder. Suddenly he was overcome by a feeling of intense physical weakness. He could barely stand.

"Ivan Vladimirovich," a modest young girl student named Natasha Zhukova, began on behalf of the students. "We want to say that we love you and respect you very much. . . only when we came into the garden we were confused, we were afraid of you and we didn't. . . ."

"Yes, I understand," Michurin smiled gently. "I too. . . when you crowded round me, I felt rather shy too, and that's why I lost my temper."

"So you forgive us?"

"It is for you to forgive me. Evgeny Gri-goryevich and I have been having a long talk about you. A splendid chap, your professor. True, he has given me a bit of a scolding here. You must have heard him. But I don't take offense. What's true is true. I'm rather backward when it comes to theory. Evgeny Gri-goryevich, I thank you. Excuse me if I may have been rather short with you. You see, I have spent my whole life working on the soil. . . ." "No, Ivan Vladimirovich, it is I who must ask your pardon," Kartashev said suddenly, realizing in a flash what it was that

had prevented him from understanding this man.

Michurin glanced at Kartashev and he too understood that there was to be no more intolerance between them.

"I am to blame," Kartashev repeated with emotion, covering his swollen eye with his hand.

"I don't think so," Michurin said sadly and turned to the students. "Stepan will show you three apple trees over there, three miracles which I would not exchange for anything in the world."

"Are the apples so delicious?" Natasha Zhukova queried in delighted surprise.

"No. They are quite ordinary so far. But they already ripen at 58 degrees north latitude... Yes, er... Evgeny Grigoryevich, I daresay I was wrong. . . ."

"Ivan Vladimirovich, I. . . ."

"Just a minute. You are always interrupting me. What was I saying? Ah, yes. . . Tchh, tchh, for goodness sake. . . Terenty! Ask the students to come over here again, please!"

The students approached.

"Now listen to what I have to say. When I say that I perform miracles, it is usually thought that I am indulging in idle boasting or self-advertisement. That mistake, I want you to know, is due to a lack of imagination and the ability to think in terms of big things. I repeat: you will see three miracles. Close your eyes."

Michurin closed his own eyes and with a sweeping gesture invited the students to take a mental excursion over the vast map of the country.

"Picture the map of Russia. Draw a line 500 km. like this from south to north and several thousand to the east. Imagine the millions of children over there who have never seen fruit trees in bloom. Try to envision it all in terms of kilometres, tons, centuries, and the happiness of millions. Good. Now you may go."

The students moved away in awed silence. Michurin looked after them for a long while.

The scientists were left alone.

"Listen to me," said Michurin in a gentle and somewhat sad tone as he turned to Kartashev. "What I said to you today over there among the blossoms is the end. My last fit of rage. The last crumbs, so to speak. Forgive me. It must be old age. I feel myself getting more good-natured every day."

"But you understood what I mean?" Kartashev said deeply moved. "It is hard to relinquish one's viewpoint all at once. After all, it is not as a student that I have come to you but with my own, complete viewpoint on the world."

"Now, now, I wouldn't say that."

"Pardon me, but nevertheless I came. You subdued me and I am grateful to you."

"I thank you. But, Evgeny Grigoryevich, are you sure you understood *me*? You see, I tried at first to hide my uncertainty and my difficulties by shouting. Afterwards it became a habit. And before I had a chance to look round, the gardens were in bloom and my life had been spent."

At that point Ryabov appeared visibly excited. "Ivan Vladimirovich," he gasped. "The

Chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin, has come to see you."

"What?"

"I mean it. He's coming here."

"Good gracious. . . What is this? Listen here. . . What are you doing to me!?"

They came down the garden path toward each other, the president of the young Soviet land and the scientist, he who was learned in matters of tilling the land, studying each other from a distance and trying to suppress the excitement that bubbles up within outstanding personalities on those rare occasions when they meet. Never, it seemed, had the gardens bloomed so riotously before. The birds sang their hymn of praise to Spring, and the young girls echoed their glad song as they worked on their tall ladders amid the sweet-scented branches helping the flowers perform their mysterious erotic functions, gently forcing on them the beneficent will of man, the creator, for the sake of the common good.

Nature is beautiful. Her taste in colour combination and form is impeccable. At any time in any place nature makes the earth harmonize with the sky, and the water harmonize with the land. There are no and never will be any ugly trees or flowers. Despite the apparent chaos that prevails in Nature, however inert and unresponsive she may be to the efforts of man, she will always be dear to him. Lofty talented minds will always worship her eternal beauty, and show the gratitude of the human soul to nature for her bountiful gifts. And as long as the world exists, even when human genius will have wrested all nature's secrets from her, she will still be beautiful, and man's noble joy in contemplating and possessing her will never be exhausted. His joy, on the contrary, will increase, it will grow deeper, broader and purer. For what groves, thickets, slumbering forests can compare in beauty with man's handiwork—a garden in bloom?

Michurin's garden was thriving. All the eight hundred varieties and kinds of fruit, berry, vegetable and decorative plants collected from North Dakota, Canada, Japan, Manchuria, Korea, China, Tibet, Persia, the East Indies, the Balkans, France and England and from the vast Union of Soviet Republics: all the forty-five varieties of apples, the twenty varieties of pears, the thirteen varieties of cherries, fifteen varieties of plums, every conceivable kind of gooseberry, wild strawberry, rowan, walnut, apricot, almond, grape, raspberry, melon, rose, tomato, lily, tobacco—everything that ever grew on the soil and things that had not grown before—all merged in one miraculous flourishing family in this beautiful garden.

"Remarkable! You are exactly as I had imagined you," said Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin, stretching out his hand from afar. "How do you do, Ivan Vladimirovich!"

"How do you do, Mikhail Ivanovich. You, too, are exactly as I had pictured you."

"It is glorious here," said Mikhail Ivanovich, casting a radiant look over the garden. "That short walk through your garden has made me feel ten years younger. You are very fortunate!"

"Yet at times I feel very sad."

"Indeed"?

"Yes. You see, I was born too soon, Mikhail Ivanovich. My eyes have only just opened and my days are drawing to a close."

"Ivan Vladimirovich, you do yourself an injustice. Why, life is only just beginning."

"That is why I feel so sad. Nature, Mikhail Ivanovich, like society, is still, I regret to say, in the blueprint stage."

"That is true, but on the other hand, how good it is to know that the remoulding of human society and the remoulding of nature, of her hidden springs has begun in our country," said Mikhail Ivanovich gazing at Michurin with his kindly peasant eyes. "Vladimir Ilyich often spoke about you."

"Did he really?"

"Yes. It is such a pity that he was unable to visit your garden. What a source of inspiration it would have been for him!"

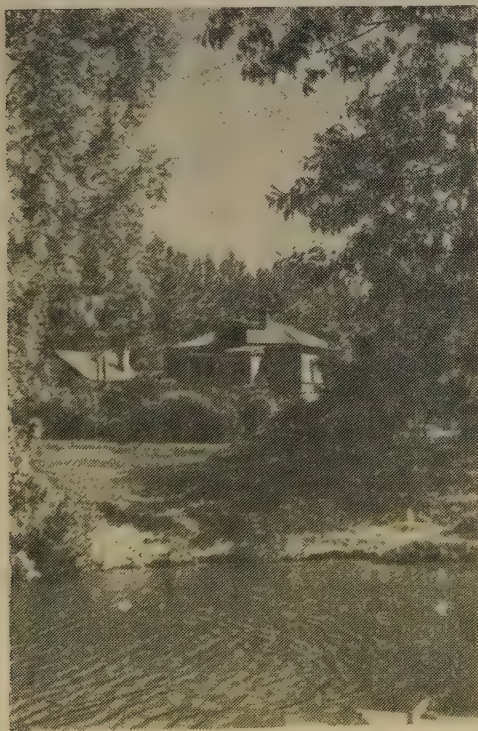
At the mention of Lenin's name Michurin took off his cap and seemed to absent himself for one brief moment.

"Yes," he said softly, reflectively. "Nature too bowed to his greatness. She was plunged into a state of icy despair. Birds froze on the wing and men's tears. . ."

Michurin showed Mikhail Ivanovich all his achievements, all the specimens of new trees, all his bold innovations, explaining the complex method of work he had evolved in the course of decades and telling him the remarkable histories of the individual trees. Carried away by this review of his life's work, Michurin forgot his duties as a host, he forgot about tea, dinner and even supper, did not notice the tiresome, ubiquitous photographers, paid no heed to respectful and timid invitations to rest and take some refreshment.

The pair was seen in earnest conversation everywhere, on all the paths, among the flower beds, on the river bank and among the young saplings. Sometimes they walked fast, carried away by the dynamics of exalted thinking, sometimes they sat down to rest on an old garden bench and talked softly and reverently as though they held in their hands the living model of the globe and were examining all its imperfections through a magnifying glass. They were visionaries dreaming only of good.

Translated by Rose Prokofyeva.



Michurin's cottage

THE VIADUCT

Stooping, the girl emerged from a small tent which I had not even noticed before, it was covered with oak branches and dead leaves. There was not a single tree in the vicinity—evidently these oak branches had been taken from somewhere else and a long time ago to be used as camouflage. The girl spread an old divisional newspaper out on the grass, then placed an enamel bowl with a cooked goose in it. She stood thoughtfully for a moment, then brought two black rye rusks. Then she returned to the tent and drew the branches to behind her over the entrance.

The general stared thoughtfully at the goose for some time. He was wearing oil-stained tankman's overalls, tightly belted. A summer cap, with a star of camouflage khaki, on the side of his round, strong head, of his once grey temples that were now clean shaven.

"Klava," said the general reprovingly.

"What is it?" came from the tent.

"Aren't there any cucumbers?"

"Yes."

"Then give us some."

The girl emerged from the tent again and laid three large yellow cucumbers on the newspaper.

"And salt?" said the general.

"Bringing it."

She went back into the tent and came out with some coarse grey salt. She had a small, narrow face with thin lips, her semi-military costume of greyish cotton gaberdine, badly made by some unskilled military tailor, did not suit her. Her blue beret was perched too high up on the middle of her head, like a tea-cosy. She put some salt onto the newspaper, looking at me sulkily, and went back into the tent, pulling the branches to again behind her. The general took up a cucumber, broke it in two, dipped it into the salt, but instead of eating it, laid it back on the newspaper again.

"Klava!" he called angrily.

"Well?"

"What else have you?"

"There's nothing more."

The general sighed loudly.

"And the chocolate?"

The girl was silent for a long time.

"Why don't you answer?" said the general.

"I asked you about the chocolate! Is there any left?"

"Yes, there's some."

"How much?"

"Half a slab."

"Well, bring it along then, for heaven's sake!"

"Very good."

"An awful woman," said the general.

"Though for that matter," he added benignly, "the rear can't keep up, we're down to the last scrapings, we're living on rusks most

of the time, and it's her job to feed me somehow. Got to spread it out."

The girl came out of the tent again, with her lips tightly compressed. She laid a huge thick slab of greasy grey chocolate down beside the cucumbers.

"Splendid chocolate," said the general. "Specially prepared by the food commissariat for army issue. Amazingly tasty, and what's most important—nourishing. The only trouble is, it doesn't look appetizing. And the packing is dull. Before the war we wouldn't have looked at chocolate like that. But now—take what you can get and be glad of it. Cream, fat, sugar. Calories and vitamins. Absolutely essential for an offensive. Take some goose—only you'll have to excuse us, there're no knives or forks. Whole service gone."

I sat down on the grass beside the general, and we stretched out our legs. We were on the inner slope of a ravine not far from Orel, which the Germans still held. Fighting was going on for the town, and the Germans held the ravine under both observation and fire from end to end.

"Unfortunately, a bomb smashed my kitchen yesterday," said the general with chagrin, "so..."

"Please don't apologize," I said.

"No, but you don't know. It was a particularly good general's field kitchen. A splendid one, the only one in the whole tank unit. Not one of the other generals had a kitchen like that. I'd specially got together a dinner service of a dozen. Everybody used to come to dinner with me—I could feed twelve visitors. Not to mention the cook, who was a wonder. Gave me better food than I'd get in the best restaurants. And now that's all gone."

The general picked up a piece of goose, tough and covered with down—it had probably been cooked hastily over a campfire—he examined it long and carefully from all sides, then put it back in the bowl and cried sadly:

"Klava!"

"I'm here," the girl replied.

"Well?" the general said reprovingly, and there was a heavy pause.

"Just a second," the girl replied.

For a long time she rustled somewhere in the straw inside the tent. At last, pushing aside the dry crackling oak twigs, she appeared holding a mug and a dull-looking bottle corked with a piece of wood. The general took the bottle and held it up against the light. It held about a quarter litre of vodka. He shook it, then drew out the piece of wood with his teeth. At that moment a girl radio operator came up and handed the general a paper covered with figures in columns of five. The general read the code swiftly and an angry flush spread over his face. He rose and turned to me.

"Are you armed?"

"Yes," I replied, rising too.

"Show me."

I showed the general my revolver. He took it, turned it over in his hands and frowned in disgust.

"Brevetato.' Italian. Where did you get that bit of rubbish? Got cartridges for it?"

"No, I haven't."

"I thought as much. You may as well throw it away. Lieutenant, the first chance you get, find the writer a decent revolver."

"Very good, Sir."

The lieutenant was a very polite young man with tired eyes and a quiet, restrained voice. He seated himself beside us in the jeep, trying to fight off sleep. He had fine, straight brows. I felt sure that he was a good son who wrote to his mother regularly. While the general had been reading the coded message, the radio operator, a girl with a thin, pretty face and high shining forehead, wearing a tall cap cocked jauntily over it, had been casting several sidelong glances at the lieutenant. His eyes had also been travelling to her face. The girl's expression was questioning. His glance reassured her. But neither he nor she even smiled once.

"Well, let's go," the general took his place beside the driver. I seated myself in the back seat with the lieutenant. In addition to us the jeep was laden with weapons and all kinds of other things which made it far from comfortable. The general looked coldly at the goose.

"Klava, clear the goose away."

The girl came swiftly out of the tent, pulling on a grey mackintosh. One sleeve slipped on easily, but she had to struggle with the other. At last the coat was on and she clambered into the jeep.

She squeezed in between the lieutenant and myself, and pulled her mackintosh over her knees with a sharp movement.

Now it really was crowded and very uncomfortable.

"Let's go!" said the general, waving his hand.

"Where to, Comrade General?" asked the driver.

"To the right flank. To the viaduct."

The jeep started off, and we hastened along the bottom of the ravine, jolting over the stones, sometimes mounting the steep side, until it seemed as though the car would overturn at any moment. As we swung round a bend, the lieutenant turned. The girl radio operator was standing beside the tent, a slender figure with wavy chestnut hair falling onto her cheeks from beneath the cap. At the turn we were jolted and shaken badly. The girl disappeared from sight. We held on to the sides of the car tightly, but even so we were thrown about onto one another. We gritted our teeth and hung on.

The lieutenant was able to explain the situation on the way. It appeared that nothing had gone right at the centre. The river bed was too soft, our tanks could not cross. There was no time to wait for the sappers to build a bridge, since headquarters had ordered the whole tank unit to cross to the other side and take Zolotaryovo in no more

than twenty three hours, and the crossing was under heavy enemy artillery fire.

The general decided on a sudden hard blow on the right flank, taking a brigade of motorized infantry through the tunnel under the railway viaduct so as to come out in the German rear, smash the enemy batteries and give the sappers a chance to build a bridge unhindered.

The first thing we saw when we finally raced up to the viaduct was a cow lying in the stream. It was quite a shallow brook, and the cow kept making abortive attempts to rise, and slumping back again. I saw that she was wounded—downstream the water was tinged with red as it flowed over the pebbles and disappeared into the dark tunnel. The cow was lowing heavily. A country lad with a shirt hanging loosely over his trousers was fussing about helplessly, running back and forth in the water, tugging at the cow's rope, while again and again she would raise herself on her forelegs, and collapse into the stream. Her head sank sideways, and her large tormented eye stared up at the sky. One of her horns was broken, the rope was fastened to the other.

The jeep pulled up against a very high railway embankment and halted. We immediately spilled out of it on all sides, as though trying to outstrip something that could move faster than we. Over the ravine through which we had just passed a thick solid-looking ball of dirty, ugly smoke appeared, spurted and writhing among fragments of stone. Then several more similar sickeningly-black clouds loomed overhead. The ravine was spattered with shrapnel and the stream seethed with the falling shot, just as we passed it. We were pressed against the side at the entrance to the tunnel, which was faced on the outside by natural stone. Inside that tunnel there should be a guard—two heavy machine guns and an anti-tank gun crew. Three soldiers entered the tunnel dragging a case of cartridges, splashing through water to their ankles. They tried to hug close to the wall as much as they could, but that was next to impossible. The tunnel was packed with people, animals, household articles and sacks of food. It appeared that a whole village had fled here to escape being bombed. Not far away, above the ravine, cottages were burning. Several cows had already been killed by the bullets which occasionally flew past the tunnel, and their carcasses lay across the stream, very much in the way of our passing machine gunners. Panic-stricken old women were standing, silent and motionless, holding sacks of flour piled up on suitcases. I could see several wooden beds, a zinc washtub, and a mattress. The circular exit to the tunnel, barricaded to a third of its height with stones, stood out with mirror-like brightness in the darkness. The black mass of people stood motionless, huddled against the damp and dripping walls.

On the other side of the high, steep embankment the Germans were concealed in the rye, seventy-five metres away from us. Soldiers of our motorized infantry, reserves whom the general had summoned, were running through the danger zone of the ravine along the stream, one after the other, bent double,

trying to reach the mouth of the tunnel as fast as possible. Seeing that it was filled with people and things, they scattered after some hesitation to the right and left along the side of the embankment and halted. Soon a whole company had gathered with light machine guns, anti-tank guns and tommy guns. Some were sitting, others were lying down, or standing leaning against the steep wall of the embankment. With their patched and spotted waterproof capes and camouflage nets, with tufts of grass fastened to their dark helmets, they seemed to merge with the ground, like fishermen covered with weeds.

On the other side of the embankment in the fields were the Germans. There was a tall, thick growth, that hid them from sight. Several German snipers who were concealed there were firing leisurely at every man who showed himself above the height of the railway track. German mortar mines flew over the embankment and exploded along the sides of the ravine, but by the mouth of the tunnel there was no man's land. That was where we were standing. Here about a hundred and fifty officers and men had gathered, ready for the attack. Two nurses who had run up with the company of motorized infantry were standing at the entrance to the tunnel, leaning against the stone facing. One might think that there was nothing going on, that there was no fighting round about. But all the time bullets were spattering in the rubble, and chips of stone were ricocheting off and flying out of the tunnel.

The general went a little way from the entrance and began climbing the embankment sideways. He climbed with difficulty, supporting himself on his hand and knee to ease the strain. His feet slipped continually on the damp, slippery grass, and some stones rolled down from under his heels. He climbed at an angle, diagonally, followed by an adjutant. When they reached the track, they lay down, careful that their heads should not rise above the level of the rails. Cautiously the general raised his small periscope. The adjutant lying beside him, spread out a map, and they began unhurriedly picking out their surroundings on it, making pencil marks as they did so. In several places soldiers were crawling diagonally up the side of the embankment, with tommy guns slung over their necks. When they reached the track, they would lie prone for a little while, heads well down, then jump up, and stooping, hurl themselves across the rails and disappear. Evidently they were slipping down the other side to concentrate somewhere. Now the German bullets began whistling more thickly, and German mortar shells were bursting much oftener on the sides of the ravine, throwing up clumps of torn-up grass and soil. One soldier waited at the crest longer than the others, and then began descending again, and went up to the nurse, holding his hand out before him. He was a tall, handsome young fellow, with his helmet pushed to the back of his head, the strap tightly embracing his square chin. His waterproof cape, flung back over his shoulders, rustled as he moved. He held out a trembling hand with bloodstained fingers before the girl. A finger had been torn off by a bullet. The girl opened her first-aid

kit and bandaged it deftly and still he stood where he was.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" she said. "That's all."

He cautiously laid his arm with the bandaged hand round her shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"Galya," he said in a tender voice, with that clear deep bass note of a very young man.

They evidently knew each other very well, perhaps they loved each other.

"Well?" she asked, raising her broad face with the snub nose and bright eyes.

"Galochka, be a good pal, please, and give me a couple of first-aid packages. I used mine up on Sergei."

"Can't be done: I've only got six left myself."

"Give me one, sweetheart, so I won't have to keep crawling back again. Be a sport."

"Now just tell me yourself, how on earth can I give you any when I've only got six left myself."

"Well, give me two of them."

"You're crazy! Give you two. Somebody else's two. And then others see it and want some too."

"Nobody'll see," he whispered in her ear.

She flushed, and swiftly thrust two first-aid kits into his hand.

"Only don't tell anyone. Keep quiet. And be off now."

She stealthily glanced round, and suddenly she blushed hotly. Another soldier was standing beside her with his hand outstretched. He had a dejected but sly look on his face, and a patch of earth on his nose.

"And what about me?"

"I knew it. Give one, give another, and what'll I have left? I've got to bandage people. Get along with you."

But he stood motionless with outstretched hand. She spat in disgust and pushed a package into his hand.

"And don't let me see you round here again. Well? It's you I'm talking to. Go along and fight. Nothing for you to do here..."

They nudged each other, winked and made off, into the tunnel, their waterproof capes rustling, their boots splashing through the water.

High overhead, in a rift between three heavy drifting clouds, a tiny German observation plane appeared, leisurely circling and tracing figure eights. Then it disappeared. Everyone became rooted to the spot, expecting a barrage. The tension became unbearable. Klava looked up anxiously, and then glanced towards the enemy. She wiped the sweat from her forehead with her sleeve. A slight flush stained her thin cheeks. She seated herself on the ground, leaning back against the wheel of the jeep. All the various sounds round about us—the brief vicious whistle of bullets, the thin whine of mortar shells, the distant rumble of bombs, the rattle of tommy guns, the lowing of cows—all those sounds seemed to recede into the background, out of the zone of our attention, leaving silence, against which we would catch the distant menacing drone of the first approaching German shell. But at that moment one of those short, heavy July thunderstorms burst, covering everything with a dark, suffoca-

ting downpour. Objects, people, landscape, all lost their clear contours, becoming hazy and misty. The heavy drops of rain drove into the stream, which steamed and seethed with the impact. Overhead, thunder crashed and rattled, as though dry boxes were descending upon us. By the vicious sulphurine flash of lightning we saw the general and the adjutant jump up, dash across the rails and disappear over the other side of the embankment. Our motorized infantry followed them swiftly.

"Oh, Lord," said Klava, pressing her hands to her heart.

She jumped up and dashed into the tunnel. A moment later she emerged again, driving a cow; the beast ran awkwardly and heavily, the rain immediately darkening its hide. Klava followed it, her coat thrown over her head, holding it together beneath her chin. Her thin lips were pressed together angrily, and wet strands of hair fell over her face, as she splashed through the raging stream with her heavy leather boots. Two fussy old women followed her, dragging a trunk from the tunnel, their eyes rolling with terror.

"Well, what are you standing there for?" Klava cried as she passed me, and shrugged her shoulder angrily.

I understood, and ran into the tunnel. It must be evacuated while everything round about was wrapped in the dark mist of the downpour. I seized the bridles of two horses huddling against the wall and ran out with them. The people saw at once what they had to do.

I should never have guessed that so many people could fit into that tunnel. Now they all began running, driving their cattle and dragging their sacks and the rest of their belongings. They even had carts with them, onto which they flung trunks, washtubs, beds and mattresses. They crossed themselves at every thunderclap, and at every lightning flash the old women's eyes filled with terror. The crowd ran down the ravine and disappeared round the bend. The downpour continued, but now through the stifling mist, as though a gate had been opened, there crept the fresh, rich smell of hundreds of kilometres of flowering buckwheat, ripening rye, field daisies, and parsley. Two girls medical orderlies thrust their heads out under the rain, and were enjoying a good shampoo, washing each other's hair in the water poured out so generously from heaven. The soapsuds trickling from their curls ran down their merry faces. They rinsed their hair, soaped it again and rinsed it in the warm stream of that July thundershower. They were overjoyed at having been able to do so. They rubbed each other's heads and I could hear them chattering, interrupting each other, and laughing.

"Rub harder, Galochka, rub harder," said one of them. "Don't be so gentle, go on."

"I'm rubbing it as hard as I can now."

"Put some more soap on."

"I am."

"Go on, don't be stingy. At last we'll have clean hair."

"What lovely soft water!"

"Grand, isn't it!"

They were washing each other's heads with strawberry-scented soap, and round about them

the warm, fresh perfume mingled with the bitter, honey-like smell of buckwheat.

"Katya, have you cashed in your priority order for a frock at the army shop?"

"Yes, I've got it."

"I haven't had time to go yet. Are they nice?"

"Not so bad. I got a blue one, artificial silk. Very decent-looking."

"I'll have to go there, or the best ones will all be gone."

"Don't put it off too long."

At that moment the general, doubled over, ran down the embankment, his boots slipping and sliding over the wet grass. He jumped across the stream and held out some sort of red object to me.

"Take this," he said.

"What is it?"

"A revolver, the one I told the lieutenant to get you."

He pushed a small revolver in a holster into my hand. It was covered with blood.

"From a dead German?" I asked.

"No, that's the lieutenant's revolver."

"What's happened?" Klava asked, running up to us.

"Nothing's happened," the general replied morosely.

For some time he said nothing. The rain trickled down his face, dark with smoke. He took off his cap and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief.

"The lieutenant's killed," he said.

Klava threw up her hands.

"Take it," the general said with decision.

"Rinse the holster in the stream, and throw away that Brevetato of yours."

I stood there for some time, hesitating, uncertain of what to do, holding the blood-stained holster of the lieutenant's revolver out in front of me. It was like a nightmare. Then I took out the small, well-made, clean, oiled mauser and washed the holster in the stream.

The rain ceased as suddenly as it had started. A very warm, bright sun peeped out. Heat beat down, and the soldiers' uniforms began to steam. Bent double, a small officer in a waterproof cape came out of the tunnel—the commander of the motorized infantry battalion. He was very hot. Water was dripping from his cape, which steamed in the sun's rays. The stream, the pools of water threw back blinding reflections of the sun, already nearing the horizon. The small officer with dirty boots, his tommy gun slung about his neck, came up to the general and halted, waiting for orders. Sweat trickled down from beneath his helmet.

"Well?" said the general, frowning. "Drive them out?"

"No, Comrade General. Can't get near them. They're all in the rye. Can't see them, and they pick us off as they like."

The general's frown deepened. He wetted his index finger and raised it to ascertain the direction of the wind. He was soaked to the skin; his overalls dark with the wet, and steam was rising from his back.

"Burn the rye!" he snapped.

"We've tried it. It doesn't burn. It's damp."

"Damp?" the general repeated, irritated.

He stood for some time staring at the battalion commander who was standing to attention in front of him, tommy gun round his neck, his rain-darkened waterproof cape steaming in the sun. Then the general took a map folded napkin-wise from his large breast pocket and with his pencil indicated the line that the battalion had to occupy, after driving the Germans out of the rye in front of the viaduct at all costs.

The battalion commander had a cold, and sniffed convulsively several times. He had weary eyes, ringed with a network of dry wrinkles, and a small, clipped moustache.

"Send a lorry for the lieutenant's body," said the general.

"Yes, Comrade General."

The general stood frowning in the sunshine.

"You haven't tried to light it with petrol?" he asked, and again stared into the commander's grey face.

"No, we haven't."

"Should have done. Go along. No, wait. I promise you the Order of the Patriotic War, first grade. I shall pin it on you myself on the battlefield. You know I keep my word. Goodbye, and good luck. Carry on. Don't forget the lorry."

The general held out his hand to the battalion commander. The officer saluted and disappeared into the tunnel. In a few minutes a jolting, jumping lorry raced up to the viaduct, and four iron barrels were thrown out of it. Soldiers immediately rolled them into the tunnel. I threw my Brevetato into the stream, and fastened the lieutenant's revolver to my belt—it was as small, well-made and reliable as its owner had been. On the other side of the embankment a machine gun rattled, and there were several thuds of bursting hand grenades. We looked through the tunnel, and saw, as though through a spy-glass, the wall of crushed, broken rye with smoky, red tongues of fire crawling along its edge. The wind was driving the fire towards the Germans. It ate up the grain with giant appetite. In the rolling clouds of black smoke, grey-green German figures with raised arms dashed about. We could hear hundreds of voices, a ragged "hurrah" and then everything became a confusion of flame and smoke.

"Let's go," said the general, slipping the map and the roll of orders and medals taken from the lieutenant into his breast pocket.

We seated ourselves in the jeep and raced off. Now the general himself was driving. Klava sat beside him, huddled in her coat. The driver sat beside me, and on his other side

there was a lieutenant whom I did not know—the general had told him to come with us; so again there was no room to sit in properly. The general drove with desperate speed. Again we had to hold on to the sides of the machine with all our might. Again we were shaken and hurled onto one another. We gritted our teeth and hung on. When we came back to the place from which we had started out, evening had fallen, and a pale, dim moon was hanging low in the sky but not yet casting any shadows. The general brought the machine up with a jerk beside his tent. The bowl with the goose was still standing in the same place, but around it the ground had been torn up by bombs. German aircraft had raided the Corps H. Q. twice in our absence. Luckily, there had been no losses. Black, crumbly soil was scattered over the bowl with the goose.

"Klava," said the general, when we jumped out of the jeep. "Have we got anything to eat?"

"Nothing," said Klava.

"But the sausages?"

"There are some sausages."

"Then give us some of those at least, for God's sake."

She dived into the tent and came out again with a tin of sausages, which everyone was heartily sick of. She began opening the tin with a German dagger. While she was busy with that, the general was shaking the soil off the divisional newspaper. Several girls from headquarters came running up to me.

"Have you been there? Is it true? Is he really killed?"

I showed them the lieutenant's revolver with its holster, and the bullet hole through it. They turned away. I saw the girl radio operator standing somewhat aside—tall and slender, with strands of chestnut hair falling from beneath her cap onto her very pale cheeks. She stood in silence for some time, then just as silently turned and went away.

The general pulled out the wooden cork with his teeth and poured a little vodka into the mug. He thought for a moment, and then drank it off in a breath, without eating anything.

"Don't be upset, Klavochka," he said gently, catching the girl's hand and clasping her fingers with his strong hand.

She wiped away some tears with her sleeve.

One after the other, tanks were rumbling past us, hastening to reach the river before dark and cross it by the bridge which the sappers had finished without further interruption.

SON

(Excerpt from the poem)

Vova, my son! I am not late. You hear me?
Today the ranks shall find us with the rest.
But why no letter have you sent to cheer me,
Your mother and your sister are distressed.

Vova! You lack the strength to lift a finger,
The strength to raise your head, to give
a sigh,
The strength to wipe the cheek where tear-
stains linger,
To fill your lungs in long, protesting cry.

Must those beloved eyes reflect forever
Only that blue, that blue, that bluest light?
And will those charred and shrunken eyelids
never
Allow the daylight to disperse the night?

Look—there among the vines and hedges—
Our house—in cooling shadow, door ajar—
And there the steep ravine, now spanned
with bridges—
You wanted so to build them—there they
are.

And do you sense that on some wondrous
morning,
You will be joined with her whose name
I spare,
With her whose presence makes an end of
mourning,
The golden-haired, of all the world most
fair?

My son is dead. He was a son to cherish—
Handsome, gentle, talented, and brave.
But now the tempest sweeps the vale, to
perish
In vaulted space above his homeless grave.
The tempest blows, the trumpet hoarsely
sounding.
It shrieks across the ruins, howls in snow,

But can that night be named as the
beginning?
For nothing has beginning, nothing—end.
Then kindly life concealed what Fate was
spinning
The grief that on this father should descend.

Throughout those early years when he was
growing,

Listen, listen, listen to the cannon!
Our troops are moving forward to the west.
That means attack. That means you must
abandon
Mouldy earth, must rise up from your rest.

Then from the front's incalculable distance,
From the vast distance where reside the
dead,
My son gave answer with a grim insistence,
Upraising then his burning, lifeless head.

"Call me not, nor trouble the departed.
Call me not, oh father, call me not!
We fly a course that none has ever charted.
We fly through blood and fire. That is our
lot.

Against the clouds impassioned wings are
beating,
As fallen, fighting comrades cleave the
skies.
So close our ranks that there is no
retreating,
And no return from where our squadron flies.

I do not know if there shall be a meeting.
I only know the battle is not yet won."
"We all are dust whose earthly day is
fleeting.
Never shall we meet again, my son."

*

Screams in chimneys, stridently expounding
The price of human life, of human woe.

It tells how two once met, and from their
yearning,
One nameless night his being was begun,
A tiny flame within his mother burning,
A light whose glow as yet belonged to none.

■

Life was a joy of feelings and of forms,
A joy of clouds, of airports, joy of knowing
The blast of winter snows and summer
storms.

The boy grew up. His curls were always
tangled
By the wind, his cheeks aflame with frost.

In southern seas he swam and rowed and angled,
His skis the northern fields and woodlands crossed.

Music he loved—the unrestrained passion
Of the strings, the martial dignity of brass.
When at his lessons, it became his fashion
To have the radio pour forth a mass

Of music—as much as room could hold—
tender
Flutes and booming drums and signal-calls.
He loved the songs that balalaikas render;
And Georgian songs from far Caucasian halls.

He craved for work no less than sleep and breathing,
To draw, to paint, to master some new tool.
His brain with complex formulas was seething,
And logarithms followed him from school.

He modelled ships which never saw the oceans,
Made sets for plays which never saw the stage.
Three lives were little to fulfill his notions,
His zeal for work would well supply an age.

On Moscow streets he watched with joy the growing
Giants fashioned out of steel and glass.
He stood enthralled to see the sunlight throwing
Javelins of light against their mass.

How many tires his bike wore out in making
Trips through Moscow and the towns nearby.
How many films his camera spoiled in taking
Pictures of whatever pleased his eye.

How often would he go to sleep or waken,
Happy in the knowledge of his friends,
With them, how many aimless walks were taken
Along the river, where the city ends.

He never wore a hat until December—

So much less trouble, and so warm, he vowed.

On holidays in Moscow I remember
His shining eyes when he was in the crowd.
That summer he was in Crimea staying.
There in noonday brilliance blazed the sea,
Blazed the sand. Blazed the steppe, conveying
Scent of thyme and locust's melody.
All this his ardent eye observed, divining
Slightest glint of silver at the shore.
Here first he saw a Girl, the vision shining
Lovelier than any seen before.
But suddenly the girl escaped him, leaving
Golden laughter ringing in his ears.
He stood alone, with quickened breath,
unbelieving,

His mind oppressed by melancholy fears.
But why this sadness? What could be the reason

For his roaming where the waves beat wild?
He used to tease the girls in any season—
This son, not yet a man, no longer child.

Oh, what was this, what was it, how recapture
This ecstasy unknown to him before?
And suddenly, in mingled pain and rapture,
He saw a vast and splendid life in store.

Life then first touched him with its meaning.
Now all is over. That the first, the only time.
Oh sea! Fling high thy briny spray in keening
A bitter confirmation of my rhyme.

And thou, oh thyme, upon the steppeland blowing,

From whence the earth is filled with locusts' song,
Today there is no girl, no noonday glowing,
The tempest blows, it blows the whole day long.

Today there is no boy, is no Crimea,
The tempest blows, the trumpet hoarsely sounds.

The crimson roads, relentless as Medea,
Lead only to the battle's holy grounds.

And from the rim of drying, staring socket,
Down grimy cheek there steals a lonely tear,
And from the picture in the soldier's pocket,
Young eyes look out on all that was so dear.
And every evening in the ancient city,
Ravaged by bombs, her people robbed and slain,

The tempest sings a requiem in pity
For lovelorn youth entombed upon the plain.

*

Not only in this war have Germans hated
Our sons. Even in nineteen twenty-three,
The year my son was born, they watched and waited,

Baring their fangs against our liberty.
I saw their clumsy, solid cities; rotten
With stench of sauerkraut and margarine,
Stuffed with self-conceit, like dolls with cotton,

Blaring advertisements in red and green.
Their sated burghers kissed and had their quarrels,

Gave birth and died, unwitting of the cause.
Their "Deutschland über alles" served for morals,

It was the best, the highest of their laws.
How dark their life, how soiled, how overclouded

With petty sentiment! Their love for beer
And sausages all other love outcrowded.
But space forbids, as does my taste, that here
I should enumerate their worthless treasures.
Meanwhile, the future killers of our boys,
Unconscious of their fate, were taking pleasure

Only in sleeping, sucking, breaking toys.

And you, our ancient foe, whatever your calling,

THE LAKE OF THE MOUNTAIN SPIRITS

This is the story of the geologist, Volkhov, a huge broad-shouldered man with a round Mongolian face, who made a name for himself as an explorer of the more inaccessible parts of Siberia. His story, he said, was an interesting one, and one where the chief merit goes to good sense and sober analysis. "There is much," he said, "that stands out vividly in my memory that I probably can't convey to you but I hope that you'll get some idea of my work in Siberia."

Some years ago, I went on an excursion to investigate the Central Altai—the crest of Listvyaga and the heights on the left bank of the Katun. At that time I was prospecting for gold, and although that summer I found no auriferous sand worth anything, I was delighted with the very interesting geology and the natural beauties of the Altai. There was nothing especially striking about the place where I was working. Listvyaga is a comparatively low crest without any eternal snows, which means—none of that glittering variety of glaciers, mountain lakes, threatening peaks and other assorted mountain views which captivate one among the higher ranges. But the stern beauty of the bare rocky masses pushing up from the shaggy taiga, which surged over the round rolling hills, tossing like a dark green sea made up for the rather dull life in the broad swampy river valleys, where my work took me for the greater part of the time. I love these northern parts, with their silent grimness, their subdued, monotonous colouring—love them, it may be, especially for that primitive solitude and wildness that is their main characteristic. I would not change them for all the gaudy glamour of the south, which haunts us on the Caucasian and Crimean Rivas, littered with cigarette ends and empty cans. And at those times when I hunger for freedom, for nature—as every explorer does when he is shut up among houses for a long time—it is pictures of grey cliffs that I see, of leaden seas, and the sombre depths of damp pine forests, cedars with their broken crowns. . . .

In addition to my main work, I had another assignment—to examine the bed of excellent asbestos along the middle reaches of the Katun, near the large village of Chermal. The shortest way there lay past the highest Katun crest on the Altai, along the valley of the upper Katun. After reaching the village of Uimon, I would have to top the Terektinsk crest—a high, snow-capped ridge—and then come out again in the Katun valley through Ongudai.

It was only here, on this part of the route, that I felt the real enchantment of the Altai. I well remember the moment, when, after trekking a long time through the thick forest of firs, cedars and deciduous trees, I de-

scended with my pack horse caravan into the Katun valley. Here the water meadows held us up badly. The horses sank to their bellies in the thick sucking mud concealed beneath the surface vegetation. Every dozen yards cost incredible labour. But I would not halt for the night, for I had resolved that that night must see me on the right bank of the Katun River. The waxing moon soon rose over the mountains and it was easy to find our way.

The monotonous rush of a swift river greeted us as we came out on the bank. In the moonlight, the river looked very wide, but when our guide on his fearless horse entered the dark, swirling water, with the rest of us following, we found that it was only knee-deep, and we made our way easily to the opposite bank. Avoiding the wet sandy willow-grown shore, we again found ourselves in the swamp which the Siberians call karagainik. Here and there on the soft carpet of moss were poor-looking pines, and everywhere there were tall rushes with hard leaves rustling over them. To camp in such a place would mean leaving the horses all night without food, so I decided to push on. An ascent raised our hopes of finding some dry spot. Then the path dived into the velvety black depths of a spruce forest, and the horses' hoofs sank into a soft mossy carpet; it was not very cheerful, and we were sorry for the tired horses. When we had ridden for about half an hour, the forest began to thin out, we saw pines and cedars, and the moss disappeared almost entirely; the slope, however, far from lessening, became steeper, and however much we tried to keep our spirits up, this two hours' climb after all the difficulties of the day came very hard on us. So you can imagine how glad everybody was when the horses' shoes began to ring, striking sparks from stones underfoot, and we came out on top of an almost level spur, with grass for the horses and a dry spot for tents. In an instant the animals were unloaded, tents set up under a huge cedar, and after our usual tea and a pipe at the camp fire, we were soon sound asleep.

Everybody slept late in the morning, after the previous day's labours. I was awakened by the bright sunshine, and instantly went out of my tent, to find a fresh breeze tossing the dark green branches of the cedars. To the left, the light contours of four sharp white peaks seemed to be suspended in the translucent rosy light, framed by two trees. The air was marvellously clear, and the steep sides of the snow-capped tops glowed with every possible shade of rose. A little lower was the blue-humped top of a glacier with massive patches of indigo shadow, bringing out in still stronger relief the airy lightness of the upper masses which seemed to glow with

some light of their own against a sky of pure gold. I could not tear myself away from the sight of these unexpected snowy peaks. Some minutes passed, the sun rose higher, the gold took on a purple shade, the rose fled from the peaks leaving them blue, while the glacier sparkled like silver. The clappers on the horses rattled, men called to one another beneath the trees as they drove up the horses to be loaded, then rolled up the packs and bound them on, while I gazed enchanted at the magic play of light over the heavy masses. After the narrow range of vision on the taiga paths, after the grim wildness of the bare tundra hills and the heavy, gigantic masses of cliffs, this was like a new world—a transparent, shining world of changing colour.

As you see, my first love for the high Altai peaks flamed up unexpectedly and with great strength. It was a love which brought me more and more discoveries. I won't try to describe my feelings when I saw the marvellous transparency of the azure or emerald waters of a mountain lake shining with the gleam of blue ice. I'll content myself with saying that the sight of these snowy mountains gave me a keener understanding of nature's loveliness. That almost musical play of light, shade and colour were like the notes of a glorious harmony.

Avoiding the higher regions in our route, I descended again to the Katun valley, and then came out onto the Uimon steppe—a flat bottom with excellent feed for the horses—yes, and for us too, in the hospitality of the small villages scattered over it. The further Terekhtinsk heights gave me nothing of geological interest, as the broad flat tops were of unchanging granite. The rise on the Uimon side was impossibly steep, and cost plenty of sweat for horse and man, while the language used was sufficient to scorch the grass trod by my caravan. The black forest itself—a thick taiga of mingled cedar, spruce and fir, with tall grass to the riders' shoulders—was very difficult for my heavy packs with the artillery saddles and large cases. So you can well understand how glad I was when I came out on the flat watershed above the forest line. But here too, at the edge of eternal snows, we found a broad line of bog where we struggled and stuck until we hit on the idea of crossing it obliquely, along the border of the snowfield.

The descent to Ongudai was easier, but long and monotonous. The prolonged trek through such difficult parts had developed a strange patience in me, when the body goes through all the hardships of a difficult road, while the mind is dormant, waiting. . . .

On arriving at Ongudai, I sent my assistant with the collections and equipment through the Altai to Biisk. I could travel light to the Chermal asbestos bed. Taking only one guide and setting out with fresh horses, I soon arrived at the Katun and stopped to rest at the village of Kayancha.

Tea with fragrant honey tasted especially good, and we sat for a long time at the newly-planned table in the little garden with the young teacher who had invited me in. My

guide, a silent, grim Oirot¹ sucked unconcernedly at his copper-trimmed pipe, while I questioned my kind host about everything worth seeing along the further route to Chermal. He willingly told me all that I wanted to know.

"There's another thing, Comrade Engineer," he said. "Not far from Chermal you'll find a village. There's a famous artist of ours living there—Chorosov, you've probably heard of him. He's a crusty old chap, but if he takes a fancy to you he'll show you everything, he's got no end of grand pictures."

I remembered pictures by Chorosov that I had seen in Tomsik and Biisk—particularly *The Crown of Katun* and *Khan-Altai*, and I made up my mind that come what might, I was going to visit the artist. Now I saw everything very differently, and thought of them as being amazingly true to life. What had seemed to me invented or exaggerated when seen on canvas in the cramped rooms of a picture gallery was amazingly beautiful in reality. I realized that the diminution in scale and plane, usually favourable for exact representation in motion-pictures, made it very difficult to bring these snowy peaks with such gigantic heights and masses of colours onto the screen. Chorosov had not been able to avoid this drawback either, despite his great talent. However, what he had put into his pictures was a more faithful reflection of the cold, shining spirit of the mountains than had been achieved by any other artist. To see his many pictures, and perhaps to get a sketch for myself, struck me as being an excellent conclusion to my first acquaintance with the snow-peaks of the Altai.

The path along the bank of the Katun was easy to follow, so I dismissed my guide in Kayancha, and by the middle of the next day I was mounting the low but steep rise. From its top the sun-filled even mouth of a valley opened before me, golden with ripening grain. At the edge of the forest, several new houses shone with their fresh yellow logs. In one place deciduous trees formed a promontory jutting out from the forest mass, enclosing a small open space planted with bright peonies, and there I could see a large building. Everything was exactly as the Kayancha teacher had described, and I turned my horse confidently towards the house of the artist Chorosov.

I was expecting to see a gruff old fellow, and was agreeably surprised when an agile, dried-up, clean-shaven man with swift, exact movements, came out onto the porch. When I looked more closely into his Mongolian features, however, I saw the lines on the fallen cheeks and the high, protruding forehead, and the grey at his shaggy temples and bristling whiskers. He welcomed me politely, but without any particular enthusiasm.

Over the inevitable tea I poured out my heart to the artist, or better, poured out all that had been stored up in it from my recent visit to the heights. Evidently Chorosov felt that my enthusiasm was sincere; he began to thaw and his Oirot taciturnity expanded into friendly talk.

After tea he took me to his studio, a spa-

¹ Oirots—a mongoloid people inhabiting the Altai Region.

cious unplastered room with large windows extending half the width of the house. Among the numerous studies and small pictures there was one that attracted me immediately.

Chorosov told me that this was a variant of the picture Deny-Der, or the Lake of Mountain Spirits, which was in one of the large Siberian galleries. I had heard about it, but had never seen it.

I shall describe this picture as exactly as I can, because it is very important for the proper understanding of further events. It was a small canvas—not more than a metre in width, in a simple black frame, its clear colours shining in the rays of the evening sun. The grey-blue expanse of lake filling the central part of the canvas breathed a silent, cool peace. In the foreground, by the stones on the flat shore where the green carpet of grass alternated with white patches of snow, lay the bole of a cedar. At the very roots of the fallen cedar a large blue patch of ice stretched along the shore, while smaller ones intermingled with grey boulders cast greenish and blue-grey shadows on the surface of the lake. Two short, wind-racked cedars raised their thick branches like hands stretched upward to the sky. In the background, the steep, serrated snow-covered heights, ribbed with cliffs of violet and pale yellow, rose sheer from the lake. In the centre of the picture a glacier crevasse filled with blinding snow sent a wave of blue drift to the lake, and high above it soared a triangular pyramid like a diamond, with a scarf of rosy clouds drifting at the side. On the left side of the glacier crevasse was a cone-shaped mountain, likewise almost completely wrapped in its snowy mantle. It stood on a broad base which descended in gigantic steps to the far border of the lake. . . .

The picture breathed that same remoteness and cold shining purity which had enchanted me on the way to the Katun crest. I forgot about all the other canvases and stood there, forgetful of time, gazing into the veritable heart of the Altai's snowy peaks, amazed at the subtle vision of the people who had given that lake the name of Deny-Der—the Lake of Mountain Spirits.

Chorosov watched me with contracted eyes, evidently pleased at the impression produced.

"Where did you find that lake, Grigory Ivanovich?" I asked. "Does it really exist?"

"The lake does exist. And what's more, it's much better, of course, than you see it here," Chorosov replied. "But it's no easy matter to find it. . . ."

The artist scanned me closely before he continued.

"You probably don't know the Oirot legends about that lake?"

"Oh, they ought to be interesting, if they've given it such a poetic name!"

Chorosov's eyes travelled to the picture.

"Is there nothing that you notice particularly about that picture?" he asked. "Most people don't see it. . . ."

"Yes, just here, in the left-hand corner, where there's the cone-shaped mountain," I said. "Excuse me, Grigory Ivanovich, but here the colouring struck me as being just impossible."

"But look a little closer. . . ."

I began to examine the place which had surprised me, and so fine and subtle was the artist's work, that the more I looked, the more details seemed to emerge from the picture. At the foot of the cone-shaped mountain a greenish-white cloud rose, radiating a faint light. The latticed reflection on the water of that light and the gleam of the snow gave long bands of shadow which for some reason had a rosy shade. A deeper rose lay upon the broken rocks fallen from the cliff face. And in those places where the direct rays of the sun shone over from beyond the white walls of the crest, there were elongated columns of blueish-green smoke or steam, resembling huge human figures. These amazing, unnatural colours gave that part of the landscape a threatening, fantastic character.

"I don't altogether understand that," and I pointed to the blueish-green columns.

"And don't try," laughed Chorosov. "You know all about nature and you love it, but you don't trust it."

"But you yourself, Grigory Ivanovich, how do you explain that red fire on the cliff, the blueish-green columns and the shining cloud?"

"The explanation's simple—mountain spirits," Chorosov replied calmly.

I turned quickly towards him but I could see no shade of a smile on his expressionless face.

"I'm not joking. You think the lake got its name because of its unearthly beauty? No, it's beautiful all right, but it's got a bad name. Look at me, for instance—I painted a picture, but I barely managed to get away. I was there in 1909 and I was a sick man for four years after. . . ."

I asked the artist to tell me the legends surrounding the lake.

"Very well," said Chorosov. "Come and sit down."

We seated ourselves on a broad divan covered with a rough blue and yellow Mongolian carpet.

"The beauty of that spot," Chorosov began, "has drawn people for a long time, but some mysterious force often caused the death of those who approached the lake. I myself felt its fatal influence, but of that later. One interesting thing is that the lake is more beautiful on warm summer days than at any other time, and it is just on those days that its fatal power operates the more strongly. As soon as people who came to the lake saw the blood-red light on the cliff, and the flickering blueish-green transparent columns, they began to feel strange. . . . The snow peaks about them seemed to sink onto their heads, bearing down upon them with an unendurable weight, and the rays of light danced before their eyes. People felt drawn to that place, to the circular cone-shaped mountain, where they seemed to see the shadows of the mountain spirits, but as soon as they reached the spot everything disappeared, and only bare cliffs remained. Choking, drained of strength, barely able to move their legs, crushed in spirit, these unfortunates left the fatal spot. But death usually overtook them on the road. It was only a few strong hunters who once came to the lake that managed with incredible difficulty to make their way to the

nearest tents. Many of them died, others were sick for a long time and lost their strength and daring for ever. From that time Deny-Der has had a bad name, and people have almost ceased to go there. There is neither bird nor beast to be found there, and on the left-hand shore, where the spirits gather, nothing grows—not even grass. . . I heard that legend when I was still a child, and for a long time I longed to visit the realm of the mountain spirits. Twenty years ago I went there and spent two days absolutely alone. The first day I noticed nothing out of the way, and worked for a long time, making study after study. However, that day there were thick clouds racing over the sky, the light changed continually, and I could not catch the transparency of the mountain air. I decided to stop for one day more, spending the night in a wood about 400 metres from the lake. In the evening I felt a slight nausea and there was a queer burning sensation in my mouth which made me spit continually. . . The next day dawned bright, with a promise of glorious weather. I pushed through to the lake with a heavy head, fighting my weakness, but was soon absorbed in my work and forgot all about my malaise. The sun was hot when I finished a study and pushed my easel aside to cast a last glance over the whole lake. I was tired out, my hands were trembling; every now and then my head felt strangely dull and heavy, and everything would go dark before my eyes. And that was when I saw the spirits of the lake. The shadow of a cloud swam over the transparent water. The rays of the sun striking over the surface seemed still brighter after their momentary dimming. And on the further border where light and shadow met I suddenly saw several columns of a ghostly blueish-green, like tremendous human figures swathed in mantles. Sometimes they would stand still, sometimes move swiftly, or again melt into the air. Frozen in amazement, I watched them with a feeling of crushing terror. For some moments more the noiseless spectral dance continued, and then flashes and reflections of blood-red appeared on the cliffs. And over it all hung suspended a mushroom-shaped cloud shining with a faint greenish light. . . Suddenly I felt a flow of strength, my sight seemed sharpened, the distant cliffs seemed to approach close to me, so that I could distinguish every detail of their sheer sides. Seizing my brush, I chose colours with a feverish energy, hastening to bring that amazing sight onto my canvas. A light breeze skimmed the lake, and in an instant cloud the phantoms had disappeared, leaving only the red-hot coals of the cliffs still shining grimly. My sudden feeling of stimulation equally suddenly turned to weakness, my malaise took possession of me—it was as though all my strength had been drained out of the tips of my fingers still holding palette and brush. A premonition of disaster caused me to hasten. I quickly closed the sketchbook and collected my belongings. A terrible weight seemed to be pressing down upon my head, my chest. . . The wind over the lake grew stronger, clouds came down upon the heights and the pure colours of the landscape were dimmed. The spiritual, serene beauty of the lake gave place to a mournful grimness, the

crimson gleams where the phantoms had danced were extinguished, and only the dark wild cliffs reared up beneath their patches of snow. My breathing became painful and there was a whistling in my chest when, fighting my weakness and the oppressive weight that lay upon me, I turned my back on the lake. I remember, as though it were some confused dream, making my way to the place where my guides had agreed to await me, having refused to approach the lake itself. The mountains seemed to sway before me, and terrible attacks of vomiting left me completely exhausted. Sometimes I would stumble or collapse, and then it would be a long time before I could find the strength to rise again. How I got to the other lake and my guides, I don't know, and after all it doesn't matter—the main thing is, that the case of sketches strapped to my back was intact.

"But you will die all the same, Chorosov," said the old guide in the tone of a dispassionate observer, when he saw my condition. "Spittle is running from your mouth."

"Well, I didn't die, as you see, but for a long time I felt very ill. A languor and dulled sight made it difficult for me to live and work. The big picture of Deny-Der I painted only a year later, but this one I did little by little, as I got onto my feet again. Through heavy suffering I learned the truth about Lake Deny-Der and the mountain spirits that haunt it. . . ."

Chorosov fell silent, rubbing his wrinkled hands. Through the clear panes of the large windows I could see the illuminated bands of cloud suspended over the mountain tops, while the mists of dusk were settling over the fields below. The artist's story had gripped me strangely. I had no reason to doubt it, but at the same time I could find no explanation for the strange phenomena immortalized in colour on his canvas.

We went into the dining room where the bright lamp on the table dispersed the atmosphere of unreality which the artist's strange story had left. But I was unable to resist enquiring the road to the Lake of Mountain Spirits in case I should ever again chance to be in those parts. "Aha, that lake's taken possession of you!" smiled Chorosov. I took a notebook and pencil from my haversack and prepared to write down the route.

"That spot is in the Katun range, at the eastern end. You know the Argut valley? It's that deep rift between the Chuisk and Katun caps. The bottom is in passable, you have to go along the side. Up the Argut valley, twenty miles from the mouth, the Yuncour stream enters from the right, as you face downstream. You should make a note of that spot, because here the Argut makes a curve and the mouth of the Yuncour is in a broad, flat place. From there you go on up the Argut on its left bank . . . about three miles, and then on your right you'll see a small spring, or stream if you like. It's not very big, but the valley's a wide one and goes deep into the Katun range. That's the valley you must follow. It's dry and there are large, spreading leafy trees. When you get high up, you'll see a high cliff with a small waterfall, and there the valley bends to the right. The bottom of it is broad and firm, and along

it there are five lakes in a chain, one after the other—sometimes at a distance of 400 metres, sometimes half a mile. The last lake, the fifth, where the cliffs narrow, will be Deny-Der. And that's all. Yes, and I've just remembered—a good landmark! At the mouth of the spring, where you'll turn from the Argut, there'll be a small bog. On the edge of it, to the left, there was a huge dead tree without any twigs, forked at the top, like the devil's pitchfork. . . .”

I wrote down Chorosov's instructions.

In the morning I examined the artist's work. I remember several delightful studies, but there was nothing to compare with Deny-Der. I did not dare even to hint at the possibility of acquiring it, with my modest means, so I took two sketches of snowy peaks—at dawn and at sunset. Chorosov also made me a present of a small pen and ink sketch of my beloved deciduous trees, a sketch showing a deep knowledge of their nature. As I was leaving, he said:

“I see that you can't take your eyes off Deny-Der. But I can't let you have that. I'll give you one of the sketches made by the lake. Only—” he was silent for a moment—“that'll be after my death—I don't think I can part with it now. . . Don't be disappointed, I suppose it won't be long. . . It will be sent to you,” the artist added seriously, with his characteristic embarrassingly phlegmatic manner. Wishing Chorosov a long life, and expressing the hope that we might meet again soon, I mounted my horse, and fate as it turned out, made our parting final.

It was a long time before I found myself in the Altai again. Four years passed in hard work, and in the fifth I was temporarily out of action. A bad attack of rheumatism, that scourge of travellers in the taiga, put me on my back for six months, and after that I had trouble with my heart.

I fled from the idleness and boredom of southern seas to my grey but beloved Leningrad. There, my chiefs offered me a job connected with the Sefidkan mercury beds in Central Asia. In the sunbaked deserts of Turkestan I hoped finally to overcome my sickness and return to the melancholy wilderness of the north that held me captive.

In my love for the north I was most boringly single-hearted, and deprived of the possibility of plunging into the solitary open spaces, I was continually fighting my wild fits of longing for Siberia.

One evening when I was sitting at home over my microscope, a parcel was brought to me which grieved rather than gladdened me. In a flat box of smooth cedar-wood lay the study of Deny-Der, a sign that the artist Chorosov had ended his earthly labours. The sight of the Lake of Mountain Spirits at once recalled to me all the details of Chorosov's story, and the distant, unattainable beauty of Deny-Der made me feel both agitated and sad. In an attempt to distract myself with work, I placed a new polished specimen of Sefidkan ore-bearing rock on the microscope slide. With accustomed movements I lowered the tube, adjusted the focus and plunged into a study of the sequence of crystallization in mercury ore. The polished plate was of almost pure cinnabar, and I could

not study it very well. The fine shades of colour reflected from the plate were concealed by the electric light. I changed the Silverman opaque light for an oblique lighting and switched on the daylight lamp—a grand invention, replacing the sun in the narrow world of the microscope. . . . The study of the Lake of Mountain Spirits was still before my mind's eye, so that at first I was not even surprised when I saw in the microscope the blood-red reflections on a background of blueish steel, which had so amazed me in Chorosov's picture. But after a second or two I realized that it was not the picture I was looking at, but the inner reflections of mercury ore. I moved the slide, and the blood-red reflections winked, disappeared or changed to a deeper brownish-red, while the greater part of the surface still remained a cold steely hue. Excited, with a dim premonition of being on the threshold of an astounding discovery, I turned the rays of the daylight lamp onto the study of the Lake of Mountain Spirits and saw on the cliffs at the foot of the cone-shaped mountain exactly the same colourings that I had just observed under the microscope. I hastily seized the heavy Schneiderchen tables and there I saw the colours with the formulas . . . well, there's no good giving all the formulas here. I'll only say that a table of colours has been made out for mineralography, giving the finest shades of all colourings, of which there are about 700. Each shade has its own meaning, and the sum of these shades gives the formula of the mineral. And here it turned out that the shades Chorosov had shown in his picture of the home of the mountain spirits, according to the Schneiderchen table, were exactly the same shades of crimson in the various conditions of lighting, angle of rays and all the other complicated play of light which science calls “interference” of light waves. And in a flash, the secret of Lake Deny-Der was no longer a secret for me. I felt an involuntary amazement that such a solution had not occurred to me at the time, there in the Altai mountains.

I telephoned for a taxi and soon arrived at the enclosure in which twinkled the large windows of the chemical laboratory. My friend, a chemist and metallurgist, was still there.

“Ah, here's the Siberian bear!” he greeted me. “What's your trouble? Another rush analysis?”

“No, Dmitri Mikhailovich, I've come to you for information. What can you tell me about mercury?”

“Mercury? Enough to fill several large books!”

“Mercury boils at a heat of 70°, but at what temperature does it evaporate?”

“At any, my dear engineer, with the exception of hard frost.”

“So it's volatile.”

“Amazingly volatile for its specific gravity.”

“One more question: have mercury fumes colourings, and if so—what?”

“They themselves are colourless, but at times, in a strong concentration of rays, they have blueish-green shadings. When there's an

electric discharge in rarified air, they take on a greenish-white colour. . . ."

"Then it's clear! Many thanks, my dear chap!"

"Here, stop a bit, where are you off? What's all this about, anyway?" cried the chemist, trying to stop me, but I dashed off without explaining.

Five minutes later, my taxi discharged me at my doctor's door. The good old man came out into the entry, looking rather alarmed.

"What's happened—the heart giving you trouble again?"

"No, everything's all right! I just came in for a moment. Tell me, what are the main symptoms of poisoning from mercury fumes?"

"H'm, from mercury—a flow of saliva, nausea and vomiting, but from mercury fumes—I'll just look. Come in and sit down."

"No, if you don't mind, I only dropped in for a moment. Could you find out quickly, Pavel Nikolayevich?"

The old man went into his study, and a moment later emerged, holding an open book.

"Here you see, mercury fumes—the lowering of blood pressure, acute mental excitement, quickened, uneven breathing, and later on, death from paralysis of the heart. . . ."

"That's splendid!" I cried involuntarily.

"What's splendid?" asked the surprised doctor. "Death?"

Now I was sure that all my conjectures were completely justified. As soon as I arrived home, I rang up my chiefs and told them that our work demanded that I go immediately to the Altai. I asked them to allow Krasulin to accompany me—he was a young fellow working for his diploma, sensible and physically strong—a very necessary consideration in view of my still poor health.

At the end of May it was possible to reach the lake without hindrance, and it was just at that time when Krasulin and I arrived at the village of Inya on the Chuisk tract, accompanied by two workers experienced in the ways of the taiga.

I remembered clearly all the details of the way which Chorosov had told me, and in addition, there was an old, tattered notebook in my pocket—the same one in which I had written down the route as the artist gave it to me.

When my little company set up the tents in the evening at the mouth of the valley opposite the dead fork-like tree, I was seized with excitement at the thought that the next day would decide whether or not my suppositions had been correct. My excitement affected Krasulin, and he came to join me on the hummock where I was sitting, staring thoughtfully at the horned tree.

"Vladimir Evgenyevich," he began softly. "Do you remember that you promised to tell me the object of our journey as soon as we got into the mountains. . . ."

"Borya," I answered, "I hope to discover, and no later than tomorrow, a large source of mercury—it may be, even virgin ore. Tomorrow we shall see whether I'm right or not. You know," I continued, "that mercury is usually found scattered, in small concentrations. There's only one known ore bed with a rich mercury content in the world—and that's—"

"Almaden in Spain," Krasulin caught me up.

"Yes, for centuries now Almaden has been supplying half the world with mercury. Once, even a tiny lake of pure mercury was found there. Right up to the present, drops of mercury ooze into the Almaden mines. Well, I expect to find something of the same kind here. . . . That there are whole ravines there consisting almost entirely of cinnabar of that I'm certain, if only. . . ."

"But Vladimir Evgenyevich, if we discover such beds—it'll be a revolution in the whole economics of mercury!"

"Of course, my dear fellow! Mercury's a most important metal for medicine and war. Well, it's time for bed now. Tomorrow we've got to be up before dawn. I think it's going to be a dull day, and that's just what we need."

"But why's that so important?" asked Krasulin.

"Because I don't want to poison you all, not to mention myself. Mercury fumes are no joke. . . . There's no doubt that the secret of that mercury's been kept through the centuries just because of the fatal character of the fumes. Tomorrow we're going to wrestle with the mountain spirits, and then we shall see what we shall see. . . ."

A faint rosy mist hung over the mountain sides; in the valleys dusk was already falling, and only the lofty snowy caps still shone in the rays of a sun now invisible. Then they too dimmed. I sat smoking by the campfire for a long time, but in the end I mastered my excitement and lay down to sleep.

The next day, for some reason, I recall in fragments.

I have a vivid memory of the broad, absolutely flat bottom of the valley between the third and fourth lakes. In the centre was a smooth green carpet of mossy swamp without a single tree to break it, it was only on the borders of the valley that the tall cedars appeared. Leafless on one side, they seemed to be extending their mighty boughs towards the Lake of Mountain Spirits, like huge dark flags on tall flagstaffs. Low, frowning clouds raced swiftly over them.

The fourth lake was a small, round one with sharp stones jutting out from the grey-blue rippling surface. After crossing them, we found ourselves on shale thick with cedars, and ten minutes later I stood on the shore of the Lake of Mountain Spirits.

A dull, ashen light lay upon the water and the snowy sides of the mountain range, but nevertheless, I at once recognized the cathedral of the Mountain Spirits which had so seized on my imagination in Chorosov's studio several years previously.

It was no easy matter to make our way to the steely cliffs at the foot of the cone-shaped mountain, but all difficulties were forgotten the moment our geological hammer with ringing strokes struck out the first piece of cinnabar from a rib of the ravine. The further cliffs fell in slanting steps to a small hollow over which a light mist hung. The hollow was filled with hot, muddy-looking water. Hot springs sprang up from deep rifts around it, sending up a curtain of mist on the sides of the hollow.

I left Krasulin to make a rough sketch of the ore-bearing area, while I myself led the men through the mist to the foot of the mountain.

"What's that?" one of them asked suddenly. I glanced in the direction he indicated. There, half hidden by the boulders, was the dim, sinister gleam of a mercury lake . . . my dream come true. The surface seemed to bulge. With inexpressible excitement I stooped over it, and plunging my hands into the slippery, inadhesive liquid, I thought with a beating heart of the several thousand tons of liquid metal—my gift to my country. Krasulin came running up on hearing my shout, and stood rooted to the spot in speechless delight. But it was necessary to cut our raptures short and urge on our companions to complete the necessary work as quickly as might be. Our heads were already becoming heavy, and there was a burning sensation in our mouths—the ominous signs of mercury poisoning. I snapped my camera right and left, one of the men filled containers with mercury from the lake, while Krasulin and the others hastily measured the ore-bed and the lake. It seemed as though everything was completed with lightning speed, but nevertheless, on the way back we dragged ourselves along slowly, wearily, fighting a vague depression and fear. While we were rounding the left bank of the lake, the clouds parted and we were able to see the

serrated diamonds of the peaks. Slanting rays of sunshine cut through the entrance to the further ravine, and the whole lake valley was filled with shining, transparent light. Turning, I saw the blueish-green phantoms wavering over the spot we had just quitted, and gave the order to run. Luckily, the shore levelled off, and we soon came to where we had left our horses.

"Gallop, lads!" I cried, as I turned my horse, and casting a last look behind me at Deny-Der, carried away in my memory the dance of the spirits around the greenish cloud. . . .

That same day we went down the valley to the second lake. The feeling of oppression had not passed, and that night we all felt more or less ill, but in general everything passed off well.

Then telegrams began flying to the centre and back again came instructions to organize the investigation of Deny-Der, taking all precautions against the danger involved.

The enchanted lake gave and is still giving the Soviet Union a quantity of mercury that immediately made us independent of other countries.

But I have always cherished the grateful memory of that fearless searcher after the mountain spirits, whose fine and exact representation opened up the riches of the Lake of Mountain Spirits—of the artist Chorosov.

FRIENDSHIP

The people of the Kazakh steppes have an old saying which runs: "If your friend has only one eye, close one of yours to be on the same footing as he."

"What do you think of it?" I asked my two gun companions.

Colonel Zamoisky nodded understandingly, but Lieutenant Borodin, the youngest of us, was, as often happens, more sceptical than we, whom life had knocked about a good deal.

"That's all very well," he said, "but a man on foot is no companion for a horseman."

Then he told us of an incident that had happened during a ski hunt.

It was in Zagorsk (he said) in a snowy winter like this, just at the very end of the winter hunting season. At that time—not so long ago, by the way, factory construction had only just begun there; the new way of life was beginning at one end of the town, where the factory was going up, while at the other end, near the forest, where my mother lived, they were still pasturing goats during the day and at night the watchman's rattle sounded.

I was on leave at the time and I came to visit my mother, just in time for the last few days of the hunting season. It was late in the evening when I arrived, there was no time to look for a companion to go with me, and I'm not so keen on shooting alone. But there was nothing for it—I didn't want to lose a day, one of the last, so I went out into the yard to feed Trubach.

It was marvellous weather for February—a slight frost, absolute silence, a clear sky filled with twinkling stars, and through that silence, not far from our house, the watchman coming along with his rattle, sounding it so regularly that the stars seemed to twinkle in time to it. Far away, at the other end of the town, locomotives whistled, electric trucks rumbled, and some sort of an engine gasped at every third beat, while here, there were the stars and an antediluvian rattle.

"But what is it like?" I wondered, and recalled with surprise that never in my life had I seen a watchman's rattle.

"Soon it'll disappear altogether," I thought, "and then I'll never be able to see one. History will never bring those rattles back again. I'll have a look at it."

I came out of the gate, just as the watchman was passing the house, went up to him, took the rattle from his hands, tried it, and laughed. The watchman laughed too, and when I spoke to him, he spoke at the same time; I discovered that I was talking to a deaf man.

"No wonder he is deaf," I thought, "if he spends the whole of every night sounding that rattle."

I used hands, eyes, even feet to indicate to the watchman my special interest in the rattle,

and to understand, if possible, why the watchman whose job was to catch thieves, and who ought to creep up quietly, himself betrayed his whereabouts to them.

And you say that if your comrade's one-eyed, you should try to close your eye. I did my best to talk to him like a deaf man, and instead of his understanding that I was asking him about the rattle, he thought I was inviting him to go shooting the next day. However, when I discovered that he was a hunter, I was very glad to have him come, and only wanted to know how he, deaf as he was, would be able to let me know his whereabouts—otherwise it would be extremely difficult for two men to hunt with one dog. He understood me, and said:

"And what about the rattle?"

That I could understand—to use it while out shooting in the same way as a horn; but why a watchman should need it—that was more than I could fathom.

The man bowed in friendly leavetaking, and walked on, sounding his rattle.

Early next morning, just after dawn, he arrived with his gun. We walked for about two kilometres, and then Trubach started a white hare and was off after it. We went off in different directions, as is customary when there is more than one hunter and one dog, each one working out his own plan.

Contrary to all expectations, hunting was not bad, even in the deep snow. Not long before, the snow had settled and crusted over, and subsequent falls had only brought enough to reach to the dog's belly. To our great satisfaction, it turned out that the crust would bear Trubach, and he could run as though it were the first autumn fall. Unfortunately, it was a very wily hare that we had started, one of those that hunters call "professors", or "chemists". Sunday huntsmen have given these hares so much practice that when they are started, they streak away in a straight line for about two and a half versts, and when they double they twist and curve so as never to come back on their own tracks; it's impossible to lie in wait for them, and getting them is a matter of luck.

Our hare raced straight forward, and then found a swamp so thickly overgrown with small spruce that Trubach could barely get through, and running was quite impossible. In addition, as often happens, the water had first frozen and then drained away somewhere, leaving cat-ice, white and etched with all kinds of patterns, which broke under one's feet with a loud crack, like glass. There was not the slightest chance of entering the swamp and catching the professor-hare as it doubled, the only thing to do was to walk about the edge of it, in the hope that sometime Trubach would drive out the tormentor. The best thing would have been to call the dog

off and find another track, but Trubach, like all highly trained beagles, was not to be turned aside, and until you kill your hare you don't see your dog and can't summon him even with a shot.

At last the hare decided to run along the edge of the swamp, I saw him and aimed; I was just about to pull the trigger, when Trubach popped up from somewhere and nearly got the hare himself. The hare, startled, sped away from the swamp, and Trubach, barking frantically, was off after him again.

Now the hunt followed the sides of a steep ravine; the hare would race along one side, and just as I crossed over, he'd be on the other. The worst of it was that as evening drew on it began to freeze, and I'd get hot and overheated crossing the ravine, start to sweat, then the frost would catch me and set my teeth chattering. If my comrade hadn't been deaf, I'd have called out to him, we'd have made our plans and waited for the hare on either side of the ravine. And then you say that a man with two good eyes should close one of them out of friendship! I find that that's all wrong. I had no desire to close an eye or plug up my ears because I was hunting with a deaf man, in fact, I'd have liked to tear him to pieces like a wild beast at that moment. And then, you know what hunting is—the harder the frost, the more stubborn you get.

For the last time I decided to cross the ravine, and as I began this difficult job, I noticed fresh hare tracks. These were not the tracks of the hare we were chasing, they were new ones—and what's more, in one place a hare's foot had made its imprint on my ski trail. That meant that the day had come to an end, with nightfall the hares were beginning to come out. That fresh trail seemed to be saying:

"Sleep, Man, sleep; be free now little Hare, run, run about!"

I always have a feeling of awe when evening falls in the wintry forest and the hares begin to come out; it is as though Nature were expelling Man, vengeful for all that he has done to her:

"Go away, Man, go away; run, run about little Hare, run, run!"

As I hurried to cross the ravine, bearing down upon my right ski, it suddenly split, and my foot sank deeply into the snow with it. I first freed my foot from the damaged ski, then took off the other one, hoping that the crust of snow which bore Trubach so well might also take my weight if I were careful. But my hopes were in vain—the crust crumbled, and I went through up to my chest in snow. To lose a ski in snow like that is equivalent to finding oneself in open sea with a canoe that leaks—there the water sinks you, here the frost turns you to ice. You can't go half a mile without skis in such deep snow, you struggle till you're exhausted and then you freeze to death.

Evening was falling in the forest, the frosty sky blazed, with every moment the cold became more intense; the trees began to crack, and seemed to be whispering:

"Sleep, Man, sleep; run about, little Hare! Run, run about!"

There was only one hope for me—that the

deaf man might sound his rattle, and then getting tired of waiting would begin to search for me—he would hardly leave a comrade in the forest!

I examined the broken ski. The accident had been caused by just one single nail which I had driven in hurriedly several years previously, to fasten the strap more firmly. After many years this nail had rusted from the damp, and gradually this yellow, corrosive liquid had eaten into the wood, spreading and weakening its resistance. When the time came, the board had simply split across at that spot, leaving the two halves held together by a thin sliver of wood alongside. I tried to straighten the ski and stand up on the fresh snow, but it bent again. When I placed it on the track, however, it held. I tried moving along the old trail and found it possible. But there was little comfort in that.

Dusk was falling swiftly, when suddenly, quite close to me, about a hundred paces away, I heard the sharp sound of the rattle. Rejoicing, I shouted with all my might, forgetting that this was a deaf man. In fact, my shouts seemed to have the opposite effect to the one needed—the rattle began receding rapidly. In desperation, I began firing, and after every shot the rattle sounded farther and farther away—the man was completely deaf. And at that point I remembered that it was the night watchman who had been hunting with me, with nightfall he had to hurry to his job, and with a broken ski I had not a chance of overtaking him.

Now the trees were cracking in good earnest, as they do only in the very hardest frosts. There was only one thing left for me to do—to follow my own tracks back again, clamber from ravine to ravine, then come to the swamp, walk around it—in a word, retrace every movement that I had made during the whole day.

Could I do it? If I had had matches with me, I wouldn't have worried so much, I would have lighted a fire and spent the night by it; but I had recently stopped smoking, and had not brought any matches with me.

Little by little a thick darkness fell upon the forest and even the tracks of beasts became invisible, to the invisible animals the gloom was whispering:

"Run about, little Hare, run, run!"

My ski carried me along the old track, I advanced and suddenly I ran into a tree at the edge of the ravine. To risk coasting down there in the darkness was madness—the ski might catch on a bush and break completely; and if I clambered out safely on the other side, then to coast down again, and again, and yet again. . . .

I was doomed, five kilometres from the town. I could hear the whistle of the locomotive, the screech of the electric truck—even the familiar engine, with a gasp on every third beat, came to my ears distinctly, just as though I were not doomed, but had come out into the yard to feed Trubach.

"Sleep, Man, sleep!"

And suddenly the fear of death rose in my heart, chilling me to my very bones, and in that instant a plan to save myself

flashed through my mind. I would crawl along without my skis through the snow, like a bear, till I came to the place where the rattle had sounded. If I could manage it, good; if not, my fate was sealed—that meant, that I must manage it—I strained every muscle and nerve to win out—I must! Everything went smoothly. The deaf man's skis were much broader than mine, and along that wide track my damaged ski bore me as though it were unbroken, it slid and slid along. . . .

And somehow, almost before I realized it, a telegraph pole rose before my eyes, and I came out onto the road with as much joy as a shipwrecked sailor making land.

On that frosty night, all the stars had gathered over Zagorsk, the engine was gasping and the rattle was rattling just as though nothing happened. . . .

As he ended his story, Borodin turned to me and said:

"So you see, I don't advise you to close your eye, or to stop your ears with a deaf comrade."

"But wait a bit, my friend," said Colonel Zamoisky. "Why do you blame the deaf man, the one-eyed man, when the whole thing was absolutely your own fault, and nobody else's?"

"It wasn't my fault at all. What could I do there in the forest if my ski broke and a deaf comrade had left me?"

"But what's the deaf man to do with it?" asked Zamoisky. "You yourself told us that some years previously, you'd driven a nail into the ski, and for several years it had been rusting and eating into the wood, and you had paid no attention to it. It wasn't a matter of a deaf comrade, but of your own nail—and there was a screw loose in your own head."

We laughed heartily at our young lieutenant, and then Zamoisky said:

"No, all the same, I agree with the Kazakhs . . . if your comrade's one-eyed, try to close an eye, to be equal with him. I know one surprising case, when friendship helped a blind man do more than one who could see, and a deaf man do more than one with the best hearing."

And he told us about a deaf cook in Vologda, and a blind musician. Both of them were keen on woodcock shooting, which demands particularly keen sight and hearing. The blind musician had remarkable hearing, as is so often the case, while the deaf cook had excellent sight. There was no sportsman who could hear the woodcock's love call as far away as the blind musician, and nobody could see it in the twilight as quickly as the deaf cook. And every spring those two inseparable friends, the deaf man and the blind man, went woodcock shooting, and brought in many more birds than any of the ordinary sportsmen.

THE BUSINESS MEN

I

Fyodor Rozhkov was discharged from hospital at the end of May. He had often seen others leave and each time the simple ceremony of leave-taking had had its own special appeal while the bang of the closing gate had awakened dreams of movement and wide open spaces. Just like his predecessors, Fyodor Rozhkov went slowly round the ward, saying goodbye to each patient separately, shook hands with the doctor on duty, the sisters and the nurses, then leisurely crossed the yard trying not to drag his game leg, and with beating heart opened the gate.

"Good luck and pleasant journey!" the sister called after him, as she had called after the hundreds of other soldiers when they had been discharged.

"Good luck to all of you, Sister," Fyodor replied, just as the others had done before him, and brought his fingers to his cap in the customary army salute.

The gate slammed to with its usual clang, but it did not bring Fyodor the expected happiness.

With a surprise close to melancholy he looked ruefully at the hand which had just made the accustomed salute. It was hard to realize that now it would not be proper for him to salute anybody, neither his mates nor the officers, nor even a general if one came along! A chill ran down his spine, and for some reason a memory flashed through his mind—of his early childhood, when his mother had left him alone in a huge, open field. Fyodor knew well enough that his game leg would not permit him to return to the army. Many times he had pictured his return to civilian life, but it was only now that he realized the full importance of the turn his destiny had taken.

Of the thirty-two years he had lived, Fyodor had spent three at the front, but those years seemed to have thrust away all his previous life, and left a deep imprint on his soul. During the war he had grown unaccustomed to being alone. All that was needed there was to go boldly and honourably along the road marked out for him. Now everything was different. Where should he go? What path should he take?

In the breast pocket of his tunic lay a military pass to Rossosh. From Rossosh station to Filatovo was twenty kilometres. The highroad went through the fields, crossed the clearing, dived into a deep ravine with a clear, cool stream at the bottom, rose steeply again, and cutting through a birch grove, brought the traveller to the edge of the village, just by his godmother's cottage. He had only to close his eyes, and the whole way lay before him, clear as day, down to the last clump of junipers, to the oak tree

blasted by lightning, to the patches of velvet moss on the rotting brushwood left by the forester. Filatovo—home, childhood youth, mother—everything is gone!

When he was still in the army Fyodor had learned that the Germans had buried his village to the ground, that they had killed his mother, and that all the family had been driven off, no one knew where. But never had the feeling of utter loss been so acute as now, when all roads were the same for him, and there was nobody to greet him on any of them.

Why had he taken a pass to Rossosh? He would not go there, anyway. But in his visions of homecoming that road had always been before his eyes, he knew no other, and forgetful that there was no longer any home or family, he had traversed the familiar path in his dreams. . . .

Where should he go? Fyodor looked about him. He was standing in the town square, surrounded by houses—tall, many-storied, undamaged; it was a long time since he had seen undamaged houses. In the centre of the square was a little garden with benches, children were playing there and the trees wore their spring foliage of fresh, bright green, as yet undimmed by city dust. It breathed happiness and peaceful charm, but Fyodor longed for soil, for space, and he turned uncertainly towards the railway station, where there were trains carrying people away in all directions. There he would hear the people talk, would drink tea, and then turn either to right or left, wherever his fancy dictated.

He had barely turned the corner, however, when he stood frozen to the spot.

A middle-aged man in uniform, but without epaulettes, was coming towards him along the footpath. He limped as he walked, but his gait was resolute and determined. He was lean and wiry, with a strand of greying hair falling over his sloping forehead, rough with sunburn. He was walking with his head bowed, and only as he drew up level with Fyodor, did he notice him. He stopped short, and a momentary anger flashed into his light brown eyes.

"Fool! Where are your eyes?" he cried in a peremptory tone, although the fault was his own, and not Fyodor's. But Fyodor pulled up smartly to attention, hand at cap peak, eyes barely visible in a broad grin.

"At ease!" the man ordered sharply.

Then his light eyes softened unexpectedly and the taut skin of his face broke into tiny wrinkles around his eyes and mouth.

"Here, stop a bit," said the man. "How did you get here?"

"From hospital, Comrade Sergeant!" Fyodor rapped out, army style. "Discharged cured, that is, unfit for active service!"

"You've got a glib tongue," and the man suppressed a smile. "And how do you greet your sergeant? Is this the way I've taught you?"

"And how should I, Stepan Zakharych?"

"With a good s'nack, that's how, my dear lad," and the sergeant seized Fyodor round his broad waist and kissed him three times.

Fyodor hugged his sergeant and good friend, feeling with all his heart that he had now found a firm support in the new life opening before him.

When Fyodor began telling the sergeant of his plans, the latter cut him short sternly.

"That's all wrong. Come along to the pub, we'll have a drink on it and talk it over. . . ."

. . . When they had finished with reminiscences of the front, Stepan Zakharych pushed aside the empty glasses, the bottle and the plates with their cucumber rinds and tarnished forks.

"Now here's how it is, Fyodor. Got any idea how many houses there are without a man about them? One place the roof's leaking, another, the shed's falling down, there's a table or a chair without a leg, and the kids getting smoked like kippers from the stove. . . We're both carpenters, and sappers too. That means we can do anything. Get me? We'll travel about for a month, and come back with thousands. Well, what about it—coming wi'me?"

"Sure thing, I—I'll follow you, Sergeant!"

II

On the following day the two skilled workmen left the train at a little nearby town.

A cobbled road led to the town; Fyodor's stiff leg soon got tired, and the friends turned from the road into the edge of the forest. The carpet of dried pine needles pierced by thin blades of young grass gave softly under their feet. Fyodor did not notice his steps becoming slower, lighter, more cautious. It was as though he were testing the ground before trusting his weight to it, and Stepan Zakharych, following him, unconsciously copied his suspicious step. Suddenly Fyodor halted, like a gun dog making a point, and Stepan Zakharych too drew up sharply.

"Look, Comrade Sergeant."

A wire ran half concealed through the yellow needles.

"Anti-tank," laughed Stepan Zakharych.

Fyodor knelt down, and his fingers slipped lightly along the wire, thrusting aside the dead needles, pushing through the weeds. His face was grave, mounds of muscle rose on his back. The wire led to the ditch and then broke off. It was a fragment of old cable, with half rotted insulation. Fyodor pulled it out of the ground, leaving a thin depression.

"Demined, Comrade Sergeant," and Fyodor rose from his knees.

Stepan Zakharych looked thoughtfully at the ground.

Two soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder beside the quiet road, with the leaves rustling peacefully, a sweetish smell of mould coming from the forest, and a corn crane

rasping as though clearing its throat for a song that would never begin. In their minds the two soldiers could see another forest, where all the leaves, almost all the branches had been greedily swallowed by shells—a nightmare forest that on a moonlit night looked like a collection of black, torn, mutilated telegraph poles. A hideous forest, to be regarded with loathing—and they remembered it with a feeling of sadness. Fear was forgotten, but friendship, forged between those who remained alive after Myasnoy Bor would always be preserved deep down in the bottom of their hearts. . . .

They came out of the forest, and far ahead the little town appeared, with the weaving sheds high above the single-storey houses, and a watchtower rearing its zinc-roofed head over all.

The winter grain was green on either side of the road. It was still like grass, thick and lush, standing in even ranks like good soldiers. Fyodor's heart melted with a familiar, half-forgotten happiness. For three and a half years the grain had been trodden down before his eyes, crushed under heavy machines, scorched and burned before it ever had time to ripen. The smell of burning grain—the smell of calamity—was to him like the bitter pungent smell of war itself. It was so good to see the wide expanse of these untouched fields, preserved from the destruction of war!

A fine rain was sprinkling the fields from white, sunlit clouds. Slanting gold, it swept away to one side, leaving a heady perfume which rose from the ground. A wet U-2 plane flew low over the field, with two shining wet rooks in its wake.

After the rain had stopped, there was a warm breeze which sent ripples over the fields. Heavy raindrops fell from the bushes and the tall grass onto the hard burdock. Hornets, interrupted in their flight, hummed angrily and traced semi-circles in the air with flashing wings, seeking out their course.

The fields ended, and the ground fell to a hollow at the right, with a lake gleaming blue at the bottom. Three willows were growing from a single root on the bank of the lake.

The friends turned from the road, and seated themselves in the shade of the willows to eat.

A duck with a brood of ducklings was swimming on the lake. Seagulls settled, tilting their tails to the sky as they sought their prey hidden in the water. Again and again their heads would emerge with their prize clamped tight in their yellow bills. Some of them settled close to the brood of ducklings, whereupon the mother flapped her wings angrily, and the gulls, with exaggerated alarm, flew away with a great beating of wings on the water.

A tall woman was descending the slope to the lake, carrying a basket of washing supported on her hip, her faded blue frock fluttering in the wind. Coming to the water's edge, she put the basket down, tucked up her skirt, pulled out a twisted roll of washing and with a competent flip of her hands lowered it into the water, sending a blue spray flashing on all sides. The garment floated out,

the woman dipped it in the water and then began beating it upon the surface with confident, strong movements. The water splashed, the ducks ruffled their feathers indignantly and made for the bank.

The woman raised her flushed face and laughed. Suddenly Fyodor found his appetite leaving him, he wiped his pocket knife on the soft grass and thrust it into his pocket. He looked at the woman, at her arms sunburned to the elbows, at the firm stance of her strong legs. She seemed to breathe strength and tenderness. He let his fancy wander, imagining that he was this woman's husband returning after a long separation, that in a moment he would rise, approach her and take her in a strong, ardent embrace, fill his nostrils with the perfume of her hair and skin.

"A fine piece, that," he heard Stepan Zakharych's voice saying.

The sergeant's light eyes were shining. He dug out the last piece of meat from the tin with a chunk of bread, tied the remaining food up in his sack, rose, and straightening his tunic, marched up to the woman. Fyodor noticed that he was trying to hide his limp as much as possible. He hesitated a second and then he rose to follow the sergeant.

The woman was now laying the washing back in the basket.

"Can I help you?"

The upper part of her body bent back to support the weight of the basket, the woman looked at Stepan Zakharych and with the faintest shade of compassion in her voice, she replied:

"No, I guess I can manage myself; thanks all the same!"

A spark of anger, familiar to Fyodor, flashed in the sergeant's eyes; he expected to hear some rough answer, and turned away, shrinking. But contrary to his usual habits, the sergeant spoke gently, with an unusual hurt note in his voice.

"So that's what you think of us! . . . Never you fear, we've carried heavier loads than that and not dropped it. . . ."

The woman's long lashes rose only to be lowered again, while a deep flash darkened her sunburned cheek.

"No, I didn't mean it that way. . . I'm sorry. . . ."

Stepan Zakharych took the basket from her in masterful style, threw the tool bag from his shoulder and nodded to Fyodor to take it.

As he followed behind them, Fyodor could hear snatches of their talk—it sounded as though Stepan Zakharych was offering to do some sort of work.

"Oh, we'll find a price to suit you, we're not sharks," his voice floated back to Fyodor.

III

A small house with a shingled roof lay smothered in a pink and white foam of blossoming apple trees. Behind the cottage, a low pine tree extended its thick bushy branches with their waxy yellow candles. Stepan Zakharych pushed open the moss-covered gate with a confident jerk, just as

though he had been living in the house for years.

Stooping under the lintel, Fyodor followed his sergeant into the entry, with its homely smell of peasant life. The cottages in villages near the front which he had entered during the war had breathed a bitter tang of coarse tobacco, leather boots and rough woollen greatcoats. Here there was the pleasantly sour smell of pickled cucumbers, sheep and felt matting, and a warm breath from the chicken coop. All this seemed familiar to Fyodor—just the same smell, only a little drier, had been in his father's cottage. He recalled how his mother had always said: "A good housewife always has fresh air in the living room, and a good smell in the pantry. But if you smell nothing but dust in the pantry, then there's nothing but dust in the bins."

Stepan entered from the yard, drying his tousled wet head with a rough towel.

"Still dawdling? Go and get yourself washed. The goodwife's got the samovar on, it's humming." He nudged Fyodor with his elbow. "Plain to see she's been lonely!"

Fyodor ignored the jest, and Stepan Zakharych, suddenly frowning, added sternly: "But no getting fresh, see! She's not that kind. . . ."

When he had washed, Fyodor went into the living room. It was cool and rather darkened by the numerous plants standing in flower pots on the window sill. A corner of the wall was filled with photographs, one of which stood out from the others—a large picture hung with weeping grass. It showed a young fellow in a Russian shirt hand in hand with a woman wearing a dark dress with a shawl over her shoulders. Behind the couple rose a tower like a sugar loaf, with heavy clouds lowering over it. Clearly it was a very bad photograph, the features were barely distinguishable, the young man looked very much like the woman, who could with difficulty be recognized as their hostess.

"Your man?" Stepan Zakharych asked the goodwife, as she came quickly into the room holding the steaming samovar in her outstretched hands.

For an instant she brought the samovar close to her breast, then placed it on the brass tray and raised her face, rosy and beaded with perspiration.

"Mine. Only don't look at that picture. He was really good-looking."

"At the front?"

"Two years now since I got the notice of his death," she replied simply and sadly.

Fyodor glanced at the picture again, and he believed that the goodwife's husband really had been handsome.

The goodwife began to lay the table. Her movements were swift and light, it was evident that for a long time she had not known the pleasure of housewifely activities, of that especial, particularly efficient deftness which invests every housewife conscious of masculine eyes following her.

Stepan Zakharych disappeared into the entry, and returned with the Order for Valour and two medals on his tunic. Fyodor mentally cursed himself for his slowness—

he too had won medals in the war. The goodwife invited Stepan Zakharych first to the table, and handed him the first cup of tea. Supporting her broad elbows on the table, she watched her guests drinking her tea with enjoyment, eating hard cracknels spread with army fat.

"Why aren't you eating anything, Misus?" asked Fyodor.

Stepan Zakharych jumped up from the table, quickly poured out a glass of tea, pushed it over to their hostess and put a pile of cracknels in front of her.

"Oh, no, that's too much, I'll never eat all those!"

"All the more left for us, then!"

The goodwife laughed, and glancing at Fyodor, asked:

"Was it very terrible, the fighting?"

"Terrible, all right," Fyodor admitted.

"If you'd said a word like that when you were in my platoon, I'd ha'..." Stepan Zakharych made an expressive gesture, which brought the red to Fyodor's cheeks. "You're talking rot."

Stepan Zakharych took out his tobacco pouch, rolled himself a thick cigarette, and began to talk about the war. Fyodor could not believe his own ears. It was not that the sergeant was inventing, but he described events with such agenerous use of colour that the picture acquired a depth and vividness quite foreign to life at the front, where everything was simple and terrible.

"It's like as if you were reading it out of the paper," said Fyodor cautiously.

Stepan Zakharych was annoyed, and now a new shade of colouring mingled with his features. Every now and then there would be something like:

"Then I called Fyodor, this one sitting there: 'Get that done quick!' I'd tell him, and he'd race away till it looked as if his legs would run themselves off..."

"Yes, it's true, I did my duty," thought Fyodor, "but why's he got to put it that way..."

"And then there was another time," Stepan Zakharych continued, blowing a blue smoke ring. "The Germans had mined a swamp, not left space enough for a bird to light on. I got orders from the company commander to demine it... the job was to be done in two hours, at 14 hours our tanks would advance over that swamp. Time was short of course—very short, but I said—very good it'll be done. And the commander knows—of Stepan Zakharych says so, then that's that. He thought a lot of me, even though I shouldn't say so. Well, I called Fyodor," and Stepan Zakharych glanced out of the corner of his eye at his uncomfortable comrade. "He came running up, all out of breath, of course, the loon, because I was his sergeant, I could do what I wanted with him. So I told him how it was, take some men, I said, and get it done quick. And what do you think?" Stepan Zakharych pulled a big silver watch with several hands out of his pocket. "Booty, got it from a German officer," he added. "At 13:48 it was all cleared. The commander shook hands with me before all the company!"

"Eh, the poor lad," said the goodwife,

glancing at Fyodor. "He had a bad job, he had! But you," and she turned reproachfully to Stepan Zakharych, "that's not the way to go about—pushing it all off onto your comrade."

For an instant Stepan Zakharych was taken aback. This was a most unexpected turn of affairs.

"I didn't push anything off. Military service, you know what that means?"

The goodwife's interpolation filled Fyodor with a pleasant melancholy. To hold the sensation intact, he rose and went out onto the porch.

IV

The moist freshness of coming night enfolded the garden, the pleasant aroma of flowers and grass mingled with the evening air more noticeably than during the day. The scent of lilies-of-the-valley was so strong that one might have thought some tall tree filled with heady juices was sending its sweet fragrance into the garden.

Every now and then a breeze would carry away the strong scent of the flowers, and then for an instant the breath of the apple trees could be felt, so faint and delicate that it made all others seem coarse in comparison.

A cuckoo was calling somewhere in the distance, cautiously, as though careful of not reckoning too many years onto somebody's life.¹

"Cuckoo, cuckoo, how many more years shall I live?" said Fyodor softly.

For a second the cuckoo was silent, then began a new reckoning. For an instant childhood faith touched Fyodor's heart. "Two... three... four..." Smiling, waiting for the call to break off, he began counting. Because he felt sad, he wanted the tale of his life to be a very long one. Thirty-six, thirty-seven, thirty-eight—the cuckoo totalled it up swiftly and fell silent. Suppose he really had so many years ahead of him! Such a long life needs to be lived well—not any old way, trusting to luck, but just as seriously, though in a different way, as at the war...

Somebody came up and halted behind him. Thinking that it was Stepan Zakharych, he did not glance round. Then a gentle, warm breath fanned his neck. Fyodor moved awkwardly towards the door jamb.

"Your comrade's a fine man," the goodwife's voice touched Fyodor like a gentle caress.

"A splendid fellow!" he said, with somewhat more enthusiasm than he felt at the moment.

The goodwife looked earnestly at him in the darkness and laughed.

"I don't like people who think a lot of themselves."

"But you mustn't think... He fought well."

"Those that fought well didn't come home again," said the woman grimly.

Fyodor remembered the young man on the photograph, the collar of his Russian shirt

¹ An old country superstition—to count the cuckoo's calls to learn the number of years one has to live.

encircling his thin neck and the trusting expression that even the bad photograph could not conceal.

"Ought they all to have died, then?"

He felt awkward there beside the goodwife, but she was standing in the doorway, blocking his path. And as her light breath touched his neck and cheek again, it was as though he had stolen something tender from her.

A nightingale began practising its trills. Another one repeated the song, but with a freer, more resonant tone. Again the first one answered timorously, uncertainly. The second voice caught it up, soared, and held a note of sheer loveliness. It was as though it were challenging the first voice to follow, and it did attempt to, but here the cuckoo chimed in and drowned out the brief call of the inexperienced singer.

"Not got the talent," said Fyodor softly.

"He's still young, inexperienced," said the goodwife benevolently.

"Got to learn then!" came the energetic voice of Stepan Zakharych, as he came out into the entry.

Again the second voice gave the signal with a couple of calls and then a trill. But all the efforts of the nightingale teacher only resulted in the young one giving a very poor performance on one note. And then, outraged at such lack of skill, the other nightingale poured forth a perfect cascade of trills. All other birds fell silent, and only the voice of the nightingale, confident in its power and beauty, filled the night.

"Is the nightingale in the fir tree?" Stepan Zakharych asked loudly.

The goodwife nodded.

"I'll go and catch it. Have you ever seen how to catch a nightingale in your hands?"

"What an ideal!"

"You don't believe it?"

Fyodor recalled a May evening near Selishchev, when the boys had gone clean off their heads with the nightingales. They could not sleep, and one of them, a good, quiet soldier from Orel, had cried into his greatcoat. Out of all the nightingales, the most persistent had been one right above their tent, and it sobbed so pitifully that it melted their hearts. But Stepan Zakharych, seeing with chagrin how his men's spirits had fallen, had gone out and returned with the little grey bird lying motionless in his huge hand. "There he is, the rascal," said Stepan Zakharych and opened his hand. The nightingale blundered blindly round the tent, and then flew out of the entrance. It sang no more that night.

The goodwife was thoroughly indignant. She barred Stepan Zakharych's way, and her eyes flashed in the darkness.

"A fine sort of thing, that!" she said, making no bones about her anger. "Frighten a nightingale—it'll never come back as long as it lives!"

Stepan Zakharych looked at her in perplexity, sighed, and went into the room, his heavy boots thumping on the floor. He moved about noisily, and then called:

"Heh, it's midnight, time to turn in."

But for the first time, Fyodor did not heed his sergeant.

He stood there for a long time with the woman. Nothing in particular was said, but

for Fyodor all that happened seemed to have an especial significance. There was significance in the nightingale with its tireless song, in the thin sickle of the baby moon, the rustling of the trees swaying over the head, and the simple words which they exchanged such as "the moon's rising," and "the wind" dropped."

When dawn was near, the faint whisper of the trees gave way to a dull murmur. Some where in the distance a swift, heavy thunder clap sounded, and suddenly the whole garden was illumined with a trembling, dreamlike light casting an unearthly green glow over the trees, while the road gleamed milky white outside the wall—summer lightning flashed down, disappeared, and the trees murmured more loudly.

"Thunderstorm coming," said Fyodor.

"The Lord grant it. We need it. But all the time it passes over. And this is the month that feeds you for the whole year. . . Where are you from yourself?" she asked unexpectedly.

"I'm from Rossosh. Filatovo village."

"Why don't you go home?"

"Anywhere's home for a lone man. . . ."

Three flashes of summer lightning streaked down to the earth, one after the other, and in their flicker Fyodor saw the gentle, rather weary eyes of the goodwife close to his, and the care-filled curve of her brow, which nearly met at the bridge of her nose. He could almost fancy that he felt the warmth radiating from her face.

"Too many flashes, it'll pass over again," she said, gently and imperceptibly withdrawing from him in the shadow.

A phantom elder-branch and the dew-swollen wattle fence, looking as though it had sunken from its own weight, gleamed ghostlike where a second previously there had been dimly rustling, and fathomless darkness. And the quiet, shadowless world of dawn emerged in a silvery mantle of dew, in silent expectancy and melancholy chill.

"Heavens, it's morning already!" And the goodwife threw up her hands. Her face, like everything else in that magic hour, was bathed in a pale, weary light. "You can hardly keep your eyes open. Go to bed, Fyodor."

Fyodor swayed as he stepped over the threshold, his legs seemed made of cotton wool. It was only then that he realized that he had been standing the whole night through in the same position, leaning against the door-jamb as though bewitched.

Morning dreams were still leading Fyodor along light, misty paths when the sergeant undertook to waken him.

"D'you hear me or not?" An angry shout brought Fyodor back to earth, and he rose blinking apologetically. "I'm going. You can manage here alone. We'll meet at the market in a week."

"Where are you going, Stepan Zakharych?"

"To the weaving sheds. In the town."

Stepan Zakharych's face was dry and stern. Fyodor had a guilty feeling towards his comrade, and not knowing what to say, rubbed his eyes with his fist, while Stepan Zakharych's sharp, birdlike profile flashed past the window and disappeared behind the apple trees.

Fyodor gave a sigh, closed his eyes, and his head dropped on the pillow again.

V

Stepan Zakharych walked through the awakening town. His way took him past the brick building of the school, now being used as a hospital. Through the broad windows, the iron heads of beds could be seen, and the shaky bed-tables. Stepan Zakharych recalled the morning quietness in the convalescent wards, when one wakened with a feeling of returning strength, the damp freshness of one's brow and whole body, the gay, impatient cheeriness, as though returning health came to a man only during the night. He walked past one storey houses with slanting windows where the brass sides of samovars gleamed through geranium and aspidistra leaves. He crossed the market place, nearly deafened with the frantic cackling of geese. When gobbling became a little quieter, he could hear a mournful voice: "Water! who wants fresh cold water!" A sleepy-eyed girl was carrying a bucket with difficulty along the crowded lines of stalls and tables, long blue veins criss-crossing her thin arms. Stepan Zakharych drank two mugs, and feeling fresher, went on further, past the scanty park with its plywood pay desk and bright-coloured banner announcing the arrival of a band from Kovrov.

He came out onto the square, with a watch-tower, painted a light red rising in the middle. From the very top a fireman's helmet could be seen glistening in the morning sun. There were a good many people on the square—walking past quickly, as they do in the morning, reticent and indifferent.

Two he met unlike other morning passers-by—a graduate from a flying school with plain blue epaulettes on his narrow young shoulders walking arm in arm with a girl. Two broad smiles and two pairs of happy eyes flashed onto his face in passing, bringing a momentary dim feeling of uneasiness and of something lacking. Stepan Zakharych frowned in surprise and annoyance. He possessed the happy faculty of giving no importance to the passing troubles of the present, considering only the future—the unknown and wonderful. This trait had been of great value to him during the war, making him a good soldier, able to endure anything. And what he felt at the moment was minimizing that characteristic which he prized so greatly.

"Drop it!" he told himself simply and sternly. "What d'you want—to stop there and live with her? Bury yourself in Kokhma for the rest of your life? And she's not the sort you can just have a bit of fun with. . . Drop it, Stepan."

He began thinking about the work which would bring him plenty of money and an easy life, laid new, attractive plans, and the setback he had received gradually slipped from his mind. He came out onto the edge of the town reservoir and stood on the mossy wooden dam, chagrined at seeing so much waterpower going to waste. Through a gap in the wall he could see people unloading sacks of cotton from lorries in the mill yard. There were six or seven women and three men on the job. The women were sun-

burned, with strong, muscular arms, their heads tied up in white kerchiefs reaching down to the eyebrows.

He went up to the entrance, rejoicing to feel himself such a firm, clever fellow who could throw off everything, never letting any disappointment trouble him for long; then suddenly he halted, taken aback by a sudden sharp pain in his heart. The figure of the goodwife flashed before his mind's eye, her living image with her mild face, her strong, supple body—she seemed so near, so yearning, that all firmness and cleverness drained from him and his heart contracted, as though held in some strong fist. . . .

VI

. . . From the house roof a broad expanse could be seen. On either side the fields rolled into the distance with their green grass and young grain, the golden buttercups, the blueish foam of dandelion blowballs. Through a sharp break in the pine forest streamed the highroad, shining lilac, drenched in the rays of the sun. On the horizon lay the sun-bathed contours of a single huge cloud, its colour merging with the misty blue of the sky. The air was still, and the cloud hung motionless as though it had concealed itself there, in the far distance.

Fyodor's eyes were glued to his work—he was retiling the roof—but with all his being he could sense that spacious distance, he was filled with sweet peaceful content and that made the work go even smoother. Where were his slowness and awkwardness? His large rough hands had acquired surprising agility, every movement was precise, measured, filled with an easy strength, as he drove in each nail with a single blow. The rotting slats eaten away with black moss slipped down, their place taken by new, well-planed ones, sweet with the anber streaks of resin. Shingle upon shingle he laid them, firmly, a sound roof to protect the goodwife from rain, snow and wind.

How happy he would be to build a house for her with his own hands!

On the second day the work was finished. But Fyodor felt that he had done very little, so he removed and fixed the rickety door to the entry, mended the wattle fence, and made a new step up to the porch. He would have done more, but the goodwife returned from the fields. Her look of pleasant surprise made Fyodor feel very happy. But his joy was short-lived, as he suddenly remembered that now he would have to go. Where? He could no longer imagine any life apart from that little house with the new roof. He wanted nothing but to see the goodwife, to work for her. . . His round, heavy-jowled face fell into melancholy lines.

"I want to ask you something, Fedya. There's an old woman here, she's a good old soul and all alone. And the goat she's got—it's a terror—runs away every night. Eats a hole in the wattles and runs off. If you'd make her a board shed. . . Of course, she can't give you much. . ." the goodwife continued rather uncomfortably, "but she's such a kind old soul. Would you go to her, Fedya?"

"Yes, I'll go," Fyodor replied submissively.

"And as for where to sleep, don't worry about that. You're not a bit in my way."

The goodwife's face was quiet and gentle, her eyes were kindly as she looked at Fyodor, she never even suspected that the man standing before her had just felt death and resurrection.

Fyodor climbed over the rickety fence and found himself in a weed-grown yard. A goat dashed out from behind a corner of the house, tossing its head gracefully, and made straight for Fyodor.

"Catch her!" he heard, and leaped after it, ending flat on the ground with a hard, sharp horn in his hand.

A tall, scrawny old woman, with coal-black hair, threw a rope around the goat's neck.

"And what are you lying there on a stranger's burdocks for?" Her dark eyes, still filled with life, flashed at Fyodor.

"Maria Nikitishna sent me. About a shed. . ."

She was a snappy, crusty old woman, her fire had been somewhat cooled by the sorrow and grief that had fallen to her lot.

"All you have to do is to give me a bit o' food, Granma, that's all," Fyodor continued soothingly.

"A bit o' dinner! So you want to fill your belly? An' I suppose you want something good?"

"No, Granma, I'm not at all fussy."

"Giving me something for nothing, are you? An' do you know how to work?"

"A sapper . . . and not know!"

"Are you from the army, then?" asked the old woman in a more kindly tone. . .

Fyodor chopped and trimmed the wood, while the old woman banged and rattled inside the empty house with her oven prongs, every now and then thrusting out her withered, shriveled, sunburned face to cry:

"Make it strong, she's a wicked runaway!"

The goat, as though with a premonition of misfortune, continually fussed about Fyodor, she would toss shavings about with her horns, or butt the boards, squint suspiciously at Fyodor with her bad-tempered little amber eyes, and then begin tugging at her rope. . .

At midday the old woman called Fyodor in to dinner. It was a meagre spread—nettle soup and a pan of potatoes. But even that was too much for the old woman—all that she ate was two potatoes.

She cross-questioned Fyodor about the war, which general commanded which army and who gave the Germans the best thrashing. Fyodor was amazed to find that the old woman knew all the higher command by name. She was interested in the guns, too—the one that could scorch a couple of acres with one shot. Was it true what they said, that there was a gun like that?

"Of course, there is!" said Fyodor. "They call it the Katyusha."

"Well, if that's the way it is, the Germans haven't much longer to live," said the old woman and added with a quiet smile: "It keeps your mind busy, the war does. There's my boy who's been at the front right from the first days, and not found the time to send me a line."

Fyodor avoided the old mother's eyes,

not feeling any too comfortable, and gave all his attention to his food.

"I know they say he's been killed, but I don't believe it. Such a young lad couldn't be killed. No," and she shook her head. "I had him late—I was over forty when he came... Manka! You hussy! . . . Scat!" cried the old woman suddenly and waved her bared arm, gnarled and sinewy, through the window. The goat had torn her rope and with a run, had butted her horns into the freshly planed boards of the shed.

Towards evening, the old woman gave Fyodor a mug of Manka's pungent milk and a crust of bread. Accustomed as he was to the generous army rations, Fyodor's hunger was far from being appeased, but he continued working until he had driven in the last nail. The old woman banged the shed walls with her poker, then turned her bony shoulder to it and winked at Fyodor.

"Now I see—you're a sapper all right!"

Fyodor helped the old woman drag the struggling Manka into the shed, and made his way home through the heavy damp burdocks.

Fyodor was in a hurry, he was afraid that it would be too late to see Maria Nikitishna again. Dusk hung over the earth, the blue of day was still in the sky, although a thin golden sickle of moon was rising.

Seeking a short cut, Fyodor left the path, climbed over somebody's fence, descended to the weed-grown pond and mounted the slippery side of the ravine. A cold breath rose from the ground, and the dew shook off the grass onto his feet. He struck the path in sight of the cottage. The window was dark. . .

Slowly he approached the house. Swiftly falling night had drawn a dark mantle over the sky.

The door was unlocked; Fyodor opened it cautiously, closed and bolted it behind him. It creaked faintly under his hand. The goodwife was sitting at the table in her dark dress, with a shawl over her shoulders. A faint steam still rose from the fat-bellied samovar.

"I waited till I thought you were never coming," said Maria Nikitishna, passing her hands over her eyes and cheeks as though brushing away her drowsiness. "I was feared you might have lost your way in the dark."

"Waited!" He had somebody again who waited for him, was worried about him, sorry for him. . . Touched and softened, he began talking eagerly, in jerky phrases, about the old woman, about her ridiculous goat, and suddenly ended:

"It's good here! . . . Couldn't find anything better anywhere!"

Maria Nikitishna straightened up and volunteered.

"I love our parts! We've got grand folks here, both our own and them that come from other parts. There's a Leningrad woman living here with her daughters, and she's that polite and pleasant! . . . And our own women, they're wonderful good housewives, and decent-living folk. Our collective farm's doing well, I could say it's rich. Though there's no men left here, we've got a real go-ahead women's farm. We've drained the bog beyond the common, and got ourselves a lot o' land that way. They even wrote about it in the papers. It was a job an' all, of course—

ed softly under Fyodor's hand. "This is my home," he thought, and a feeling of peace, warmth and confidence—the feeling of coming home again—rose in the soldier's breast. . .

VIII

The sun rose over the forest and approached the top of the tallest pine. The rain-wet road was glistening.

The mist had withdrawn to the distant fields, but pale fragments of it were still tangled in the wires, the branches of the weeping birches, the prickly pine branches and the fences.

A cart rattled lightly and a horse's hoofs clopped along cautiously. Somewhere a well winch creaked in a tenuous, broken note. It was as though all sounds had but just awakened and not yet come to their full strength.

A man was walking along the road leading from the town. His faded tunic with the brighter green patches on the shoulders fitted his muscular form neatly. A small box was fastened tightly to his back by broad straps that crossed his deep chest. It was plain that the load was not a heavy one, and that his heart was equally light—that the man had brought neither wrongs nor regrets with him from the town. He was lame, but that did not prevent his gait from being resolute and determined. One would have said that with this light, springy step he could easily stride around the world.

On the outskirts the houses thinned out, and fields opened up in the broad spaces between them. The heavy grass sparkled with dew, and the mist melted rosily in the distance.

He halted opposite a house half hidden among the apple trees whose blossoms were already losing their pale rose-coloured freshness, stood for some seconds thoughtfully, and then walked resolutely towards the gate.

As he entered the living room, the dry smell of burnt bricks caught him. The stove had been taken down, and a tall fellow in overalls made of newspapers was mixing lime in a bucket. Hearing footsteps, he turned, and his eyes became round with surprise as they fell upon the newcomer.

"Stepan Zakharych?!"

"Why, lad, didn't you expect me? I was through sooner than I expected, and here I am," and Stepan Zakharych threw the toolbox from his back and lowered it to a bench. "Well, how's the work gone?" he continued abruptly, his narrowed eyes taking in the room.

"I've been working. . . ."

Stepan Zakharych took out his tobacco pouch, but finding it empty, thrust it back into the pocket again.

"Here's what I've decided, Fyodor. We've been working separately, so we'll each keep what we've earned for ourselves. What you've earned is yours, and I'll keep mine. OK?"

The delight that flashed onto Fyodor's face made the sergeant frown in disapproval. "Evidently the fellow's greedy," he thought and snapped angrily:

"You agree? Settled, then!"

"Stepan Zakharych, that's a load off my mind. . . ."

The sergeant's lips closed in a scornful line. "All right, don't fret. I'm not trying to get anything that's yours."

"An' what would you be trying to get, Stepan Zakharych? What I brought with me, I've got, and that's all."

Stepan Zakharych rose from the bench, his light-blue eyes seemed to pierce Fyodor as he said unbelievably:

"How's that? Been lazing around?"

Fyodor rose too. His tall figure seemed to shrink awkwardly in his discomfort.

"I worked all right. . . . but I didn't take any money. . . ." He raised his kindly blue eyes, and not lowering them before the sergeant's stern glance, he suddenly said firmly: "I can do neither more nor less, I can't take money like that. And there you have it!"

Stepan Zakharych gave Fyodor a sharp aloof look, as though trying to learn something from his face, then threw back his head and laughed, baring his yellow teeth with the black gaps between them.

"Well, Fyodor my lad, you've gone and done it! Because I'm stripped to the bone, too, haven't even got any tobacco left." Stepan Zakharych pulled out his pockets, turning out a few crumbs of bread and tobacco. "And I've been working maybe better than you have. Mended a flyer, a mighty complicated machine. Never had such a hard job in my life. And as soon as they began to talk about paying me, then like a proud devil I had to say: 'Take it as a gift from the Red Army.' Yes, it looks as if we're chips of the same block."

Fyodor was looking at Stepan Zakharych with such admiration in his eyes that if the latter had cherished any grudge from the past it disappeared without a trace in that instant.

"Well," said Stepan Zakharych, "we'll have to go and look for some other job. Coming with me?"

Fyodor shook his head quietly.

"No, Stepan Zakharych, I'm stopping here."

Stepan Zakharych looked at his friend in surprise, and then his glance took in the room; everything seemed to be in its old place, but at the same time there was the illusive, barely perceptible changes which take place in every home when a new person comes to live there.

"Well, think of that," he said simply.

"Congratulations, if that's the way it is. . . ."

In the evening Fyodor and his wife accompanied Stepan Zakharych to the train.

"Where are you thinking of making for?"

asked Fyodor, as the distant pines glowed green in the engine headlights.

"I rather fancy trying Kamchatka."

"Kamchatka?"

"Kamchatka," Stepan Zakharych repeated firmly. Sensing a faint chagrin at the happiness of the two before him, he had named Kamchatka by chance, just because it was far away. But now he himself believed that he really would go there. "They need good men there badly. . . ."

Seizing the rail, Stepan Zakharych jumped lightly onto the moving step, and the train,

having halted for an instant at the dark platform, rolled away, rapidly gathering speed.

"Be sure to come and visit us!" Fyodor shouted into the darkness.

"Yes, be sure and come!" his wife echoed.

The train, already rolling away fast, disappeared from the station. For some time the red tail light could still be seen, then it passed round a curve. But for a long time the rustle of distant trees could be heard, echoing the powerful rush of the train.

VERA INBER

PULKOVO MERIDIAN

(Excerpts from the poem)

Diamonds. Sparkle. Gifts which cannot ease
The sorrow of a city where all faces

Are marked by death, by hunger, by disease.

What value here these opalescent spaces,

This glint of garden, glittering of trees?

They should be covered, covered like a

mirror

In homes where death makes sparkle only

drearier.

But how to cover them? No warming mist

Arises to becloud the airy dome.

Unmelting snow, like Ural amethyst,

Has found upon the boughs a lasting home.

More rose than southern rose the sunset's

splendour,

All things exhale a beauty fiercely tender.

And when, above the streets, the morning

star,

shedding its matchless brilliance from

afar,

Then such a coldness from the earth is

drawn,

It seems the cosmos gasping to behold

How very souls are frozen by this cold.

A trifling touch is wanted to explode

The mine fields of my memory, whose charge

I fear, fear vastly in the night. And yet I

goad

My mind to venture there, to roam at large

Among the crouching death... With no

concession

To timidity, and no recession

From affright, I press ahead,

So that this pen, my own life's blood imbibing,

May trace its message with an ink so red,

A year may pass from its inscribing,

A life may pass, and still the words will

glow

With that same crimson which my wounds

did show.

An unrelenting battle shall be waged

With every weapon that our wrath commands—

With tears of children, sorrow of the

aged,

With lonely grave upon the distant sands.

Even our own, most intimate despair,

For sake of victory, we shall not spare.

Translated by Margaret Wettlin

NIGHT IN OCTOBER

My writing experience has taught me that it's much easier to work in the country than in town. In the country everything helps one to concentrate. The spluttering of the wick in the tiny paraffin lamp, the sound of the rustling wind in the garden, and the moments of quietness when the earth seems motionless, to be hanging silently in space.

That is why, in the late autumn of 1945, I went to a village beyond Ryazan to work. There was a small estate in that village with an old house hidden deep in its garden, and here lived old Vassilissa Ionovna, a former librarian from Ryazan. I had come to this old homestead to live and work in former times, and each time I saw the garden more overgrown, and the house and its mistress more aged.

I left Moscow with the last steamer. Russet shores slipped past the cabin window, and endless grey waves from the side paddles swept to the shores. All night long a single lamp glowed in the cabin. I felt quite alone on the ship—the passengers hardly ever emerged from their warm cabins. Only a lame sapper captain with a wind-burned face and eyes narrowed from much peering into distances was tramping the deck and watching the banks, smiling. Winter would soon be here—the leaves had long fallen, the withered grass lay pressed to the ground, the weeds had turned black, and white smoke was rising from the cottages of the villages all along the shore—stoves were all burning. And the river itself was prepared for winter, too—nearly all the piers had been taken up or submerged, the buoys were in, and our ship could travel by night only thanks to the grey moonlit haze hanging over the earth.

In Moscow people had been surprised at my selecting the river route. The ship took two days to reach Novoselki, where I had to leave it, whereas a train would reach the nearest station in six hours. But only those could be surprised who had never known the wonder of autumn days on the river, or those for whom nature was merely something inevitable, but unworthy of attention.

On the ship I talked to the sapper, and we were glad to find that we were both leaving the boat at Novoselki; after that the captain would cross to the far bank of the Oka by boat and cross the water meadows to Zaborye, the same village, which was my destination. The ship should arrive in Novoselki in the evening.

"It's not Zaborye I'm going to," said the captain, "I'm going further, to the forestry station along White Lake, but our way's the same as far as Zaborye. Though I'm from the front, and have seen plenty there, all the same it's gloomy going through that wild part alone at night, with not a soul

about. You see these," and he pointed several ribbons on his tunic and smiled, "but all the same, I was afraid to go about the streets in Moscow—with the crowds and traffic rushing about everywhere! I worked in the forests before the war, and now I'm demobbed, I'm going back there again. The forests are wonderful! I'm a trained sylviculturist. Why not come and stay with me? I'll show you places that'll make you open your eyes. At the front I used to dream of them nearly every night."

He laughed, and it seemed to take years off his face.

When the ship put in at Novoselki late in the evening, there was nobody on the pier except an old watchman with a light. Only two, Zuyev and myself went ashore. We had barely jumped out onto the we planks with our knapsacks when the ship swung out into midstream pouring a cloud of steam over us. The watchman with the lantern disappeared almost immediately, leaving us quite alone.

"There's no hurry," said Zuyev. "Let's sit down a bit on these planks, have a smoke and decide what to do next."

His voice, the way he sniffed the damp river air, looked around him and laughed when the ship gave a sharp whistle from round the bend and the night carried the echoes further and further till they disappeared in the forests beyond the Oka, told me the only reason why Zuyev did not want to hurry was that he was sensing the rare joy of returning to accustomed, well-loved parts which he had never hoped to see again.

We smoked, and then climbed the steep bank to the lodge of the waterman, Sofron. I rapped at the window. Sofron had evidently not been asleep, for he came out almost at once, greeted me and said:

"The river's rising today, two metres in twenty-four hours. Must be rain somewhere up above. Have you heard anything?"

"No, I haven't."

Sofron yawned.

"It's autumn, you know. Well, shall we go?"

At night the Oka seemed very broad broader than by day. There was a strong current and the river swept by majestically. The fish were leaping; in the dim light we could see the circles where they had broke water, widening until they merged with the ripples.

We crossed to the opposite bank. The cold breath of rotting hay met us, mingled with the sweetish scent of willows. We followed a faintly visible track, and came out onto a path in a meadow. Everything was very quiet. The moon was sinking towards the horizon, and its light was already dim.

We had to cross a water-meadow island six kilometres in width, then take an old bridge over a second, narrow, choked arm of the Oka, and after that, on the other side of the sands, would be Zaborye.

"I remember it," said the captain excitedly. "I recognize it all. I don't seem to have forgotten a thing. There are the four clumps of trees! Those are willows on Prorva. Right? You see! Look at the mist over Lake Selyansk! And not a bird to be heard. It's too late for them, of course, they've all flown. And the air! How pure it is here! I've never known such air except in our parts. You hear that cock? That's in Trebutin. Got a voice on him, he has! You can hear him four kilometres off!"

But the further we went, the less we talked, and at last we fell completely silent. The black pall of night lay over the creeks and thickets. The deep hush of night hung over us.

On our right stretched the weed-bound lake, gleaming faintly. Zuyev found walking difficult with his game leg, so we sat down to rest on a willow that the wind had blown down. I know that willow well—it had been lying there for several years and was overgrown with wild roses.

"Eh, life!" sighed Zuyev. "It's a grand thing, life, taking it all in all. I feel very conscious of it since the war. Feel it in a special sort of way. You can laugh if you like, but now I'm ready to spend the rest of my life tending a pine. True as I live! Like a daughter. And I shan't feel my life's been wasted if I manage to get it to grow. That probably sounds silly to you, doesn't it?"

"On the contrary," I retorted. "It's not silly at all. Have you any family?"

"No. I'm a bachelor."

We walked on further. The moon had sunk beyond the high bank of the Oka, but dawn was still far distant—in the east it was pitch black, just as everywhere else. Walking became more and more difficult.

"There's one thing I don't understand," said Zuyev. "Why have they stopped driving the horses out to pasture at night? They used to have them out right up to the snow. And now there's not a single one here on the water meadow."

I had noticed the same thing, but I hadn't attached any importance to it. We felt as though there were no living creature on the island besides ourselves.

I looked ahead of us and could dimly distinguish a broad reach of water. My heart missed a beat—could the old tributary of the Oka have risen so high?

"We'll soon be at the bridge now," said Zuyev gaily. "And that'll mean Zaborye. Might as well say we're there."

We went to the bank of the stream. The path curved right down into the dark water which was flowing past our feet, washing away the low bank. Here and there we could hear heavy splashes as pieces of the ground dropped into the water.

"But where's the bridge?" asked Zuyev in alarm.

There was no bridge. The water had either washed it away or else covered it, and was

already a metre and a half higher than it had stood. Zuyev flashed his torch onto the water. The swaying tops of bushes rose above its surface.

"H'm!" said Zuyev, in perplexity. "Cut us off. Water's up. I thought those meadows seemed very empty. Looks as though we're the only folks here. What should we do?"

"What about shouting?"

But that was no use. It was still a long way to Zaborye, and nobody could hear us. Besides, I knew that there was not a single boat in the village which could take us off. The ferry was much lower, two kilometres downstream, by Pustinsky forest.

"We'll have to go to the ferry," I said. "Of course. . . ."

"Of course, what?"

"Oh, nothing, I know the road."

What I had wanted to say was: "Of course, if the ferry's still running," but stopped myself. If there was nobody on the meadows and the autumn floods were covering them, then of course the ferry would have stopped. Vassili, the wise old ferryman would not sit waiting in his cabin for a single unnecessary hour.

"Well, then, come on!" Zuyev agreed. "Look how dark it's got, damn it!"

He again flashed his torch onto the water and cursed—it was already over the tops of the bushes.

"This is really serious," Zuyev growled. "Let's get a move on!"

We made for the ferry. The wind was rising, it slowly came roaring out of the darkness, bearing tiny snowflakes that slanted over the ground. With increasing frequency we could hear the plop of the breaking banks dropping into the water, as we stumbled over the hillocks and clumps of old grass. There were two small gulleys on the way, which were always dry. Now we crossed them through water to our knees.

"The gulleys are filling," said Zuyev. "Hope we don't get stuck. Why's the water rising so fast? I can't understand it."

What made it all the more alarming was that we couldn't understand what had happened. Even during the heaviest autumn rains, the water had never risen so quickly and had never flooded the island.

"And there aren't any trees here," Zuyev said unexpectedly. "Only bushes."

Just opposite the ferry a cart road ran along the island. We recognized it by the feel of the ground underfoot and the smell of manure. On the far side of the stream, a pine forest howled under the lash of the wind.

The night grew darker and colder. The water rushed and hissed. Zuyev again flashed his torch. The water was on a level with the bank and was already licking the meadow with its thin tongues.

"Fe-e-erry!" shouted Zuyev and listened. "Fe-e-erry!"

There was no answer but the howling of the forest.

We shouted until we were hoarse without receiving an answer. The snowflakes were now mingled with rain, and heavy drops pattered on the ground around us.

"Shall we go back to Novoselki—the bank's higher there?" asked Zuyev, but replied to

his own question in the same breath: "What's the good! The gulleys are under water by now. We'd never get there. The river's gone clean crazy."

We began shouting again. Our only reply was the steady, indifferent rush of the river.

"There's no ferryman," said Zuyev vehemently. "That's clear! Why should he sit there like a wood goblin if the island's flooded and there's not a soul there and can't be. Idiotic... only a few yards from home..."

I realized that only luck could save us—either the water might suddenly cease to rise, or we might stumble upon some deserted boat along the shore. But the trouble was that we did not know and could not understand why the water was rising so rapidly. It was maddening to think that there had been nothing to warn us of this nocturnal misfortune an hour before—we had rushed upon it ourselves.

"Let's go to the bank," I said. "Maybe we'll find a boat."

We went along the water's edge, skirting the flooded parts. Zuyev kept flashing his torch, but it became fainter and fainter, until he stopped using it in order to preserve the last of the current for a greater emergency.

I stumbled over something soft and dark. It was a small strawrick. Zuyev struck a match and thrust it into the mass, which flared up with a deep crimson glow. The fire shone on the muddy water, on the meadows ahead, lit up everything as far as we could see, and even shone on the pine forest on the opposite shore. The trees continued to sway and whistle in the wind.

We stood by the burning rick, staring into the fire. Disconnected thoughts chased one another through my head. First I felt sorry that I had not done half the things I had wanted to in my life, then I thought what a pity it was to die through my own stupidity. I thought how many more days like this were still to come, damp autumn days, with the smell of the first snowfall, whose freshness and sweetness, you could feel—in the air, in the water, in the trees and even in the cabbage leaves.

Probably Zuyev's thoughts were much the same as mine. He slowly drew a crumpled package of cigarettes from his pocket and held it out to me. We lighted up from the straw, that was now dying out.

"It'll go out in a minute," said Zuyev quietly. "There's water underfoot already."

But I didn't answer at all. I was listening. Through the whining of the forest and the splashing of the water I could hear faint, even thuds. They were approaching. I turned to the river and shouted:

"Hi there! Bo-oat! Over he-ere!"

In the same instant a young voice hailed us from the river:

"Com-ing!"

Zuyev swiftly stirred the straw, and flames shot up, sending a column of sparks out into the night. Zuyev laughed softly.

"Oars!" he said. "They're oars! How on earth could we ever go under for no reason at all, in our own parts!"

That answering shout "coming" had stirred me strangely. Coming to help! Coming through the savage darkness to the dying

light of a fire. That call had brought to life in my memory the ancient customs of brotherhood, help, and valour, which are immortal among our people.

"Hi! Come out onto the sand! Lower down!" came the ringing voice from the river and I suddenly realized that the voice was a woman's voice.

We hurried to the bank. Then the boat suddenly glided out of the darkness into the dimming light of our fire, and its bows thrust into the sand.

"Wait a bit, don't get in," said the same youthful voice. "I've got to bale her."

The woman climbed out onto the bank and pulled the boat up. I could not see her face. Her head was wrapped in a shawl, and she was wearing a padded coat and high boots.

"What on earth's brought you here?" she asked grimly, without looking at us, and began baling out the water.

She listened to our story in silence with apparent indifference, and then said in the same grim tones:

"Why didn't the waterman say anything? Tonight they opened the locks on the river. Before winter the whole island'll be under water."

"And how did you come to be in the forest at night, to be our saviour?" asked Zuyev jokingly.

"I was going to work," the woman replied reluctantly. "From Pustina to Zaborye. Saw a fire on the island, that meant people there. Well—and I guessed right. There's been no ferryman for two days past, nobody's there. Nothing to stay there for. I had a job to find my oars. They were under the straw in the cabin..."

I took the oars and I rowed hard, putting my back to it, but it seemed as though the boat was not advancing at all, it seemed as though we were being swept to some big black waterfall, where all that dark rushing water and the black savage night would be engulfed together. I kept looking back over my shoulder. The forested shore rose steeper, and only this told me that we were advancing. The woman was silent, Zuyev too.

At last we pulled in, stepped onto the sandy beach and climbed the steep bank to the forest, only there did we stop to light our cigarettes. Here among the trees the air was warm and calm, filled with the fragrance of dead leaves. High up the wind played its majestic melody through the treetops, and that was all that remained to remind us of the comfortless night and our recent danger. By this time I felt that the night was wondrous and beautiful. And as we lighted our cigarettes and the light flashed on the woman's face, it seemed familiar and welcoming. Her grey eyes were gazing shyly at us, and strands of wet hair strayed out from beneath her shawl.

"Dash!" Zuyev said very softly. "Is it really you?"

"Yes, it's me, Ivan Matveyevich," the woman replied and laughed quietly. "I recognized you at once. Only I didn't let on. We've been waiting and waiting for you to come back, ever since Victory! We just

couldn't believe that you wouldn't come."

"Yes, that's the way things are," said Zuyev. "After fighting for four years at the front, with death often pretty close, I had to come back here to have Dasha save me in the end. My assistant," he said, turning to me. "Worked on aforestation. I taught her the job. In those days she used to be a weak slip of a girl. And now look how robust she is! And stern, too! A real beauty!"

"Get on with you! I'm not stern," Dasha answered. "It's just—because it's all so strange still. And you're going to Vassilissa Ionovna?" she suddenly asked me, changing the subject.

I told her that I was, and invited Zuyev and Dasha to come with me, to dry their clothes and rest up a bit in the warm old house.

Vassilissa Ionovna was not in the least surprised at our nocturnal arrival. Nothing surprised her. Old age had robbed her of the capacity for astonishment, and she interpreted everything that happened in her own fashion. Now, after hearing the tale of our adventure, she said:

"Great is the God of Russia! And as for that Sofron, I always said he was a fool. I can't understand how you, a writer, couldn't see through him! Seems like you can be blind about people too. Well," and she turned to Dasha, "and I'm glad for your sake too. Your Ivan Matveyevich's come home at last!"

Dasha blushed, jumped up, seized an empty bucket and ran out into the garden, forgetting to close the door behind her.

"Where are you going?" Vassilissa Ionovna called after her in surprise.

"Going to fetch water. . . For the samovar!" Dasha called back through the doorway.

"I can't understand girls today," said Vassilissa Ionovna, paying no attention to Zuyev's vain attempts to strike a match and light his cigarette. "You can't say a word to them—they flare up like a bonfire! I can tell you, she's a comfort to me, that girl."

"Yes," Zuyev agreed, when at last he had succeeded in getting a light. "A grand girl."

Of course, Dasha dropped the bucket into the well out in the garden, but I knew how to get it out with a pole. Dasha helped me. Her hands were cold from nervousness, and she kept on saying: "She's crazy, that Vassilissa Ionovna, she's just crazy!"

The wind had swept away the clouds, and over the dark garden the stars in the autumn sky twinkled, swam in a haze and then shone out bright again, only to fade away again suddenly. I pulled out the bucket. Dasha took a deep draught from it, her white teeth flashed in the darkness, as she said:

"Oh, however shall I go back into the house—I don't know."

"Don't mind. It's all right, come along."

We returned to the house. The lamps were burning brightly, the table was covered with a snowy white cloth and from the wall, Turgenev looked calmly down from a black frame. This was a rare portrait, a fine steel engraving—the pride of Vassilissa Ionovna's heart.

THE BEES

The test pilot Alexei Alexeyevich Korolev has a bearskin lying on his floor at home, and it's about this skin that I want to tell you. But where there are bears, there's honey, and where there's honey there are bees. So I shall have to tell the whole story in the proper order.

As for Vera Mikhailovna, Alexei Alexeyevich's young wife, that bearskin is her most precious possession. Evidently there are pleasant memories bound up with it, although Korolev received it before he was married, when he was alone in the Maritime Province. Incidentally, they already knew each other when he went to take part in the war with the Samurai, and to make no secret of it, were in love. Even so, Alexei was very glad to be sent to the Far East. He thought that the best test of the strength and depth of their feelings was to be separated.

So my tale takes us to the Far East, to an aerodrome in the flowery valley of Suchan, in the month when the Red Army was preparing a crushing blow against the Japanese.

Every day trains were bringing dismantled aircraft to the airfield—dive bombers, which the workers swiftly assembled.

It is a pretty difficult and dangerous job, testing planes that have never been in the air, trying out whether the engine works well, whether the plane answers to the pilot's touch, and whether or not all the instruments are in working order.

Alexei Alexeyevich tested two new aircraft every day.

One beautiful sunny morning, when there was not a cloud to be seen and the warm air seemed to ripple over the thick grass and fragrant clover covering the aerodrome, Alexei Korolev came out to test a newly assembled aircraft. The ground crew had just rolled the first one out onto the cement runway, while the second plane was standing ready, awaiting its turn. A merry crowd of young airmen came out of the dining room after breakfast.

Korolev was delighted with the weather. "I should be able to test three today," he thought, as he clambered into the cockpit, tested all the equipment and before drawing the transparent wind screen to, gave the usual order to the mechanic:

"Test the Pitot tube!"

The young mechanic with reddish stubble on his cheeks climbed onto the fuselage and blew hard several times through the narrow opening of the tube above the cockpit. The air speed indicator swung on the dashboard, and the altimetre needle trembled. The instruments were working, everything was in order. He could take off. The engines began roaring like savage beasts, and the slip stream rippled the tall grass. The aircraft raced along

the runway, and rose from the ground. Korolev pulled the joystick towards him, and the bomber began swiftly and confidently gaining altitude. Air entered the Pitot tube. The faster the machine flew, the greater the pressure of air—and the air speed indicator registered it. The higher the machine mounted, the thinner the air became, and the altimetre needle registered the height. All was in order. Korolev looked down. The aerodrome did not look very big now, and the white cottages were like lumps of sugar scattered on it. The bridge across the river was no larger than a matchbox, with flies crawling slowly over it. Alexei Alexeyevich knew that these flies were horses drawing carts. He glanced at his watch. The plane had been climbing for six minutes.

"That means we've climbed four kilometres, no less," he thought.

From that height everything on the ground looks small. Even the forest is like grass. Korolev glanced at the altimetre which indicated three kilometres. He continued to climb, but the needle did not move. Something wrong!

It is impossible to dive with an altimetre out of order. You can't estimate height with any accuracy by sight alone, and there is a danger of crashing right in.

The air speed indicator was also stationary! "What's our speed?" he asked the navigator behind him, through the speaking tube.

"Not less than four hundred!" the latter replied, glancing dubiously at the dashboard. The needle showed only two hundred. It was clear that the Pitot tube was out of order. Could something have got into it?

"If I hadn't seen the mechanic blow through it myself," thought Korolev, "I wouldn't have believed that he'd done it. I'd have said that he didn't test it."

With the altimetre and air speed indicator out of order, there could be no question of testing the plane. Angry with the mechanic, the instruments and himself, the airman landed his dive bomber on the aerodrome. Mechanics, workers, and airmen came running across the field to him. A pickup with a red cross painted on the doors raced up and a doctor in a white overall jumped out.

"What's happened?" He thought that Korolev had been taken ill in the air.

"Engine coughing? Where?" asked an unshaven mechanic, running up. He would be held responsible for that. But he had tested everything. The mechanic was so agitated that he did not even wipe the sweat from his face. It was very hot on the airfield in the scorching sun.

"I'm quite all right," the test pilot told the agitated doctor. "The altimetre and air

speed indicator aren't working!" and he turned to the breathless mechanic.

"It's impossible! I tested everything myself!" cried the latter in amazement, crawled onto the fuselage and began blowing through the Pitot tube. The needles on the indicators trembled and swayed.

"Everything's in order," said the observer, in surprise.

"It may all be in order, but it doesn't work," snapped Alexei Alexeyevich, and clambered out of the plane.

"Take the tube apart and see what's the matter," he ordered, and began unstrapping his parachute.

He lay down on the grass beside the navigator in the shade of the aeroplane wing, cursing all creation, while the unshaven red-headed mechanic was busy with the tube. Bees flew past with their treasure of honey, and ants were hurrying somewhere through the grass, which must have seemed to them a tremendous forest.

"What in the world's this?" the mechanic asked suddenly and held out his hand to Alexei. On his finger there was some substance which he had scraped off the inside of the tube. Korolev looked at it carefully. It was sticky, yellow, and melted on his finger, becoming quite liquid and transparent.

"Looks like some sort of grease," said the German.

"There oughtn't to be any grease here," said the mechanic with conviction, and touched his finger with his tongue. "Seems like wax," he growled uncertainly. "But how could it get here?"

The mechanic walked away to the end of the aerodrome, to the white wooden boxes where instruments and spare parts were kept. Bees were circling and humming round the box that held the Pitot tubes. They crawled heavily inside, fussed about there, humming, and then emerged lightened of their burden and flew back to their labours on the field. It was evident that these tubes had struck them as just the very place to make their home and store up their supplies.

It was necessary to take all the tubes apart, drive away the bees and scrape off the wax.

The mechanic ran back to the aeroplane, and the pilot and navigator resting under the wing saw him bending double and waving his arms like the sails of a windmill.

"What's the matter?" thought Korolev, jumping up. "Mechanic gone crazy, or what?"

"Get into the plane, quick!" the mechanic shouted while still a long way off. "Shut the bubble."

No, he had not gone crazy; the bees were taking vengeance on the disturber of their peace in their comfortable new quarters.

"Bees!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"Wax! Honey!"

Now Korolev and the observer understood what it was all about, climbed quickly into the cockpit and closed the bubble. Beating off the bees, the mechanic, already stung all over, swiftly and skilfully fixed on the tube and blew through it. The altimeter arrow and the speedometre needle trembled.

Everything was in order, the engines

roared. The aircraft raced along the runway, took off and began to mount. Within a couple of minutes, mechanic and bees, aerodrome and sugarlump houses were already far below. All the instruments were acting perfectly; from a height of five kilometres the test pilot turned the machine sharply down in a dive. The plane answered to his touch like a well-trained horse. Splendid. At first a bee which had somehow got trapped in the cockpit hummed and beat itself against the glass, but soon it quietened.

"There's one thing I don't understand," I said doubtfully. "The wax was in the tube both on the ground and in the air. Why was it that the tube worked on the aerodrome and stopped in the air?"

"It's hot down below, the wax melted and let the air through if anyone blew down. But up above, closer to the sun, there's frost! The wax hardened and wouldn't let any air through. There's something else that interests me, though—where did so many bees come from?"

"Why, don't you know that there's an apiary a couple of kilometres away, up the river?"

Korolev had not known that. In the two weeks that he had been in the Far East, he had never moved a step from the aerodrome and the planes. So since today, despite the mischance, he was able to test three planes before sunset, we felt that it would be no crime to go and see the apiary and try some fresh honey at the same time.

"I'll give that beekeeper a piece of my mind for letting his bees get out of hand," growled Korolev in mock ferocity, as we walked along the taiga path to the apiary. "That mechanic's stung all over—you can't put a pin between the bumps."

However, Anton Ivanovich, the head of the collective farm apiary, welcomed us so pleasantly that Alexei Alexeyevich lost all desire to scold him. He was a round-faced old man, greyheaded, with glasses slipping down his nose.

"Come in and sit down, Comrades Officers," he cried, inviting us with a hospitable bustle into his clay and wattle cottage, which was Ukrainian style. "I'll treat you to some honey. I'll warrant you've never tasted anything like it in all your born days!"

The whole cottage shone with cleanliness. There were long towels embroidered with cocks and hens hanging on the walls, and beside the big Russian stove a beautiful young woman was busy with her pans, preparing supper.

"My youngest, Ksana!" the old man said, introducing his daughter. "And these are two officers. But sit down, sit down."

"We can't stay long, we just came to look at the apiary, and then we'll have to go," said Alexei Alexeyevich, his eyes resting on fair-haired Ksana, then remembering the morning's happenings, he said sternly:

"How comes it, Granddad, that your bees sabotage our defence work?"

"Not a bit of it!" replied the old beekeeper. "My bees help to strengthen defence. They took part in General Rybalko's famous tank raid on Prague. Think of that!"

"That's beside the point," and Korolev

told the old man about the morning's events, the altimeter, the wax, everything that had happened, down to the stung mechanic.

"No, it was none of my bees that put you out," said the old man, settling his spectacles. "Those aren't mine. They're wild ones, Savages. Or maybe they're wasps. Drones like clover, too. But mine know their place!"

"How's it that your bees took part in Rybalko's raid, Anton Ivanovich?" I asked the old man.

Scenting a certain incredulity in my question, the old beekeeper growled:

"How? How? The whole Far East knows about that. They even wrote about it in the *Red Banner* . . . you and your 'how'! You aren't long here, maybe?"

"Only the second week."

"Ah, it's clear, then!" and the old man told us how three of his sons were serving in the tank brigade, and how the previous year he had bought a tank for them with the money he had received from selling his honey in the town, how they had fought with that tank, broken through into Germany, and from there dashed south in that almost incredible raid to relieve Prague in revolt against the invader. . . .

"And now," the old man whispered confidentially, "they say that my sons, all three brothers, have come back to their own Maritime Territory to fight the Samurai. But they haven't come to see me because the whole thing's very hush-hush. . . A tank costs more than 200,000 rubles. And then you say that the bees sabotage defence work," the old man added, up in arms for the honour of his bees.

"In that case please excuse me," said Alexei Alexeyevich.

"And why not!" The old man smiled slyly and invited us to sit down at the table.

A photograph was fastened to the wall beneath the embroidered towel. From the open turret of a tank emerged the smiling face of a young man, very like Ksana. In front of it, beside the forward machine gun, stood a thick-set man in a leather crash helmet who resembled both the beekeeper and Ksana. The third man of the crew was not looking at the camera, but was fiddling with some nut on the front of the tread.

"His mother all over again!" said the old man affectionately. "My late wife was always busy, never sat still for a minute." There was unconcealed pride in the old man's face and voice. "That's my tank! And those are my sons!"

"Yes, you've got fine sons, and the tank's not bad, and the bees, and. . . ."

I'm sure that Alexei Alexeyevich was just going on to praise the old man's daughter too, but at that moment the door was flung open, and a boy of about twelve dashed into the room, panting.

"Granddad! Granddad!" he shouted, paying no attention to us. "Granddad, a bear . . . a bear!"

"Where? Where's the bear?" asked the old man. "Crazy for the honey," he threw back over his shoulder at us, as he went to another wall where two guns hung, together with a set of antlers and a lynx skin.

"On the crooked pine! By the stream! On

the crooked pine! He's climbed the tree and he's sitting there on a branch!" the boy gasped jerkily, and only in that moment noticed that there were strangers in the room.

"My grandson! Petka! My eldest one," boy," and the old man jerked his head towards the photograph hanging on the wall. "If you can keep very quiet, I'll show you how we hunt bears. . . He's come after the honey," the old man added, taking a gun down from the wall.

I was given the second gun, as I belonged to the ground service, and Alexei Alexeyevich had to content himself with being an onlooker.

The old man warned us to move noiselessly and as cautiously as possible. In front, leading the way, terribly serious and important, crept barefoot, tousle-headed, freckled Petka.

We passed through the apiary. There were streets of hives—old ones looking like blackened stumps, and well-built new ones, comfortable wooden houses for huge families of bees. There must have been over a hundred hives in all.

Heavily-laden bees, with a deep hum that was almost like a long-drawn out groan, were flying slowly to the hives with their treasure, and crowding about the entrance. They would not come out again, dusk was already falling.

The apiary was on the bank of a swift, deep, cold stream. Pines grew along its banks, leaning this way and that, bronzed by the setting sun.

"There!" Petka stopped and pointed to a pine a good distance off, at the very border of the large apiary.

"Lie down!" the old beekeeper ordered and we flattened out close to the bank behind boulders, as though in battle. It was only when I was pressed against the mossy hummock that I saw the bear. He had settled himself on a strong, low branch of a leaning, rather crooked pine, and huddled motionless against its trunk. We lay equally still.

"What's Bruin waiting for?" I thought.

In all probability he was waiting for darkness, when the bees sleep in their hives like people in their houses.

Fewer and fewer bees came droning up and as the sun disappeared behind a small mound, they ceased flying altogether. This was what Bruin had been waiting for.

The bear left the branch on which he had been sitting and slid agilely down the pine trunk. Then slowly, looking from side to side, he waddled on his hind legs toward the end hive, embraced it with his front paws and raised it. He picked it up, lifted it to his ear and listened. The bees had evidently not yet gone to sleep, or else they had been roused by the movement—anyhow, Bruin evidently could hear sounds of life still continuing within the hive. Be that as it might, holding the hive in his front paws he made straight for the stream. As he did so, he came nearer to us, so that now we could shoot with less risk of missing.

Our guns were double-barrelled ones.

The bear walked along our side of the stream a few steps more (it was only afterwards that we realized he had been looking for a deep spot), and suddenly lowered the hive into

the water. The light structure kept bobbing to the surface, but the bear pushed it to the bottom with his front paws.

"There's a clever beast!" whispered Alexei Alexeyevich.

"A clever beast by your ideas, a murderer by mine!" the old beekeeper replied morosely. "A pity I didn't shoot before."

"Quiet, quiet," groaned Petka, his eyes glued to the bear as though it had bewitched him. But Bruin was so absorbed in his work that he heard nothing of our muffled whispers.

Now he pulled the hive out of the water and again held it up to his ear. Drops fell from it into the stream, leaving widening circular ripples. Everything was very quiet, the thin whine of mosquitoes sounded distinctly in the evening hush. The bear could evidently hear no more voices from within the hive. The bees were all dead. Having assured himself of this, he raised it still higher and hurled it down with all his strength onto the stones along the edge of the stream. The walls of the hive split and broke. Hearing that crack, I pressed the trigger. But the old beekeeper had been still quicker, and his shot rang out in the evening silence, anticipating mine by an instant. The bear collapsed. We jumped up and ran to him—Petka, of course, leading the way.

First of all the old man dashed to the broken hive. The bees were all as dead as the bear.

The bear's hide was quite whole. Only one bullet had pierced it, straight into the heart. The bear was dead and his skin could now be apportioned.

"D'you know what," said the beekeeper. "So as no one should be offended, we'll give the hide to the airman, whom the bees treated so ill today, I'll take the meat and the glory's yours. Right?"

"No, it's not," I said. "The glory's Petka's first of all. If it hadn't been for him we'd never have got the bear at all."

An hour later the bearskin was stretched on poles by the cottage door, and inside, we were eating bear steak, done to a turn by that beautiful and skilful cook Ksana.

"You're a grand cook, Ksana, no worse than my Vera," said Alexei Alexeyevich, taking a second helping.

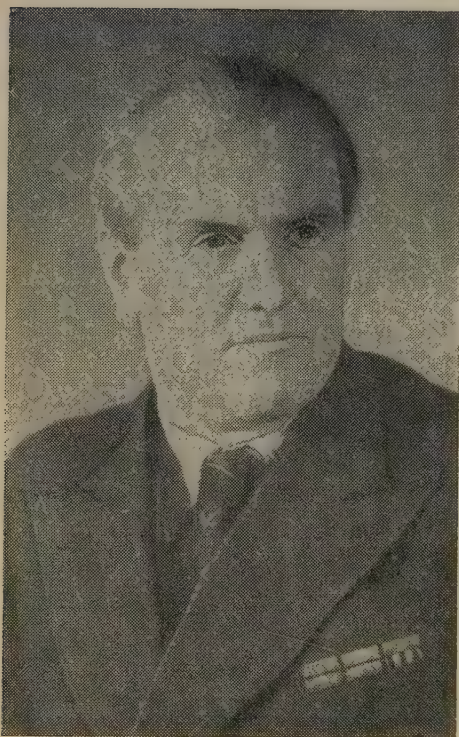
And that's the end of the story of the bearskin, now adorning Alexei Alexeyevich Korablev's room.

And if anybody wants to know why Vera Mikhailovna is so attached to that bear's skin, then I can tell them that it was just on that evening when we went to the apiary, and just in that hour when he looked at the lovely Ksana, that he realized that although Vera Mikhailovna was less beautiful, she was the only girl he could love, and made up his mind that he must marry her and nobody else. And that's why they consider the bearskin their first wedding present, given to them by the kind old beekeeper.

All short stories in No. 9 of Soviet Literature were translated by Eve Manning

BOOKS AND WRITERS

NIKOLAI TIKHONOV



Nikolai Tikhonov's works are a reflection of the entire course of his life. In his war notes dated 1916-17 we find the impressions of a youth, thrown into the flames of World War I, passing through deserted, ruined towns in the darkness of the frontline nights.

Next come the volumes of verses *The Horde* and *Country Beer*. From their pages arise the figures of brave revolutionaries who stood all trials honourably in defence of the Soviet power. Then the travel poems of the second half of the twenties and the first half of the thirties of this century. They tell of the poet's travels to the far corners of the Soviet Union, through the deserts of Central Asia and the mountains of the Caucasus. These are followed by another collection *The Shadow of a Friend*, which was the result of travels through Western Europe. Then again come a number of new cycles, closely bound up with events in the poet's personal life, his mountaineering trips, his participation as a newspaper correspondent in the storm of the Mannerheim line. And finally comes the poem *Kirov Is With Us* which brings us a picture of Leningrad, stern and beautiful, in the encirclement of the German hordes.

Here, in Leningrad, Tikhonov lived, from here he sent monthly accurate and stirring poetical sketches: *Leningrad in January*, *Leningrad in March*, *Leningrad in July*, forming a chronicle of the heroic defence.

It should be stressed here, however, that Tikhonov's poetry is far from being "autobiographical".

The personal experience of the artist has been expanded and raised to the level of that generality which is the essence of all true art. Tikhonov's tales and verses are very true to life, sometimes even documentary; but at the same time they are free from any slavish imitation of reality. Life appears in them transformed, freed from unnecessary and trifling details filtered through the heart and mind of the poet.

Amongst Tikhonov's *Leningrad Tales*, written during the war and telling of the life and deeds of the citizens of the besieged town, there is a short story *The Apple Tree* which reveals to us the author's artistic "credo".

Its action is staged during one of the fierce German air raids on the residential districts of the city. In a bomb shelter, amongst the other Leningraders, we meet an artist. Life is hard and he regrets that he refused to be evacuated to the remote rear. The great suffering of his city causes him acute physical anguish. He knows that when the "all-clear" is given, "he will emerge into the street and perhaps see newly ruined houses, fires, heaps of wreckage. . . Apartments, hanging in midair, with beds and wardrobes caught on the girders—the pitiful inventory of human life."

And truly, the raid ends and the artist steps out into the street, but what meets his eyes, is not the "pitiful inventory of human life" but the majestic appearance of heroic Leningrad: "Everything was flooded in the blinding, powerful light of the moon. Above a low wall, a huge, purplish moon hung in the frosty haze of the pale-green sky through which fleecy clouds were driving like flocks of merino sheep. The heavens seemed to ring with light and frost. The blank walls of the large houses facing the empty space appeared to be cast in bronze.

" . . . He took off his hat and stood for a moment with closed eyes. On opening them again he felt as though he had come back to earth. He was standing in his own garden, right in front of the snow-covered fountain. How had he passed the garden fence? There was no fence. The powerful blast of an explosion had carried it away, flung it far down the street, clearing away all traces of the old, rotten boards. That tree, dazzling in its beauty, was his old friend, the apple

tree, it still stood modestly by the fountain. "He looked round him and saw the city, flooded with the magic, violet moonlight. The lovely city rose all around him in its immeasurable, peerless beauty."

Already at the very beginning of his career, Tikhonov strived to express the heroism and beauty of his epoch. His poems were full of a joyous and courageous affirmation of life. A sound analysis was the basis of this love of life, this understanding of the beauty and grandeur of reality.

The heroes of his first books—*The Horde* and *Country Beer*—were daring, staunch and decisive men. They appeared before us always in action, movement, combat. Everything was swift and sweeping in Tikhonov's laconic, energetic ballads of the beginning of the twenties. The short poem *The Ballad of the Blue Packet* related a multitude of events, with sufficient action for two adventure films. The breathless dizzy rush of the rhythm merged with the almost telegraphically brief syntax, with the plot which included catastrophes, pursuits and murders, with the figures of the men who, forging stubbornly ahead, overcoming all obstacles, brought the blue packet from the front to the Kremlin. The very key of the rhymes, their general note reveals the spirit of Tikhonov's heroes—their stubbornness and persistence, their devotion to duty.

The same motif persists in other poems of those years, in the *Ballad of the Nails* for instance, which tells tersely of sailors going bravely to their death. "Festive, merry, demonic," "trained by the oar and rifle," with a soul tempered by fire and chilled on ice, the hero of the *Horde* and *Country Beer* marched to meet danger and trials. Life demanded that he be "... calm and skilful, simple as an iron nail." It might be assumed that simplicity and grim courage are the decisive features of Tikhonov's heroes. However, this "iron simplicity" very soon ceased to satisfy the poet. He was no longer interested in the simple portrayal of the external manifestations of courage. He strove to reveal the *nature* of courage, to express its inner meaning, the *idea* which inspires it. That is why he abandoned the "ballad with its bare speed and declivity of romanticism." He abandoned his seemingly reliable hero. In his program poem *In Search of a Hero* Tikhonov wrote: "These are echoes of the past but I need a real, new hero." And it was not only a matter of changing the central figure in his poems but of reconstructing the entire poetical system.

At the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers held in 1934, Tikhonov said: "What is poetry? Poetry is eternally in the process of formation and change. The poet is forever seeking a better way of conveying that which he can encompass. This eternal formation of verses, this constant search, this variability—is no tragedy."

The revelation of the poetry of ordinary life is the aim of Tikhonov's creative work. For this purpose, he began already in the middle of the twenties to reconstruct his poetical system, which seemed so clear and finished. This reconstruction lasted for ten years.

Today we can clearly see the meaning of

the shifts and changes made by the poet. At first its significance was not clearly understood. We were surprised by the persistence with which Tikhonov broke his rhythm, burdened his verse with heavy, uneven prosaisms. He introduced them into his poems as an antidote against the smooth, empty "poetical phrases" which so easily slip into all poetry on exalted subjects. However, with the years this marked clumsiness of expression appeared more and more rarely in Tikhonov's verse, having been the "price" of his creative progress.

During the years of the First Five-Year Plan (1927-1931) Tikhonov travelled extensively throughout the country and wrote much in prose. Speaking of his prose work and in controversy with lovers of ready schemes, he said: "To show the heroic deeds of the great construction jobs means to introduce into poetry that mass of new words, of new conceptions, that reality of life, which cannot be understood through the impressions of others, or verified by books or newspapers alone."

What is the essential meaning of these words? The ardent curiosity of the writer, the confidence in his ability to estimate events correctly, an organic desire for authenticity, for a profound and all-round understanding of life, hatred of stupid wonder and carelessness. Disdain of pot-boiling, of conventional play with words, of schematic craftsmanship goes side by side with profound respect for true literary art, with the wish to use the generalizing power of art. In his meetings with people, in his wanderings through the oases of Central Asia and down the broad prospects of his native Leningrad, Tikhonov felt himself a poet in search of worthy means of expression and perpetuation of the real world in artistic images. Taking up his pen, Tikhonov felt himself a citizen, a participant in the great processes of socialist reconstruction. The great work demanded great words. And here the poet's ability to see the poetry of ordinary people and ordinary events came to his aid. Tikhonov learned to reveal hidden ties, to be an analyst, philosopher and politician while never for a moment ceasing to be a poet.

He has written much about Asia. In his poems and short stories there is nothing of the sumptuous exoticism or the enervated nicety. Tikhonov is not drawn by the traditional, decorative poesy of conventional accessories. "Pineapples and tigers, sultans in cuirasses, necklaces of corpses, palaces seen in mirages..." Tikhonov has rejected all this. He portrays a new Asia, being rebuilt and readapted to modern culture. The "exotic" poverty, ignorance, and dirt are being abolished. Literacy, prosperity, civilization comes into its own. This is a process involving ordinary Soviet men and women.

Tikhonov's new heroes have much in common with the heroes of his first books. They are just as persistent and daring, just as stubborn and faithful to the purpose of their lives. But this purpose, which inspires them, now appears in much sharper outline.

The great, martial "fervour of eternal solicitude", forms the fervour of Nikolai Tikhonov's poetry and prose. The portrayal of the ideological, qualitative side of courage

has become of decisive, predominant importance in his work. The striving for a beautiful and noble aim has become part of the flesh and blood of his heroes, of the metaphors and composition of his verses, but this has in no way made them abstract or theoretical, has in no way lessened their direct, emotional and poetical strength.

At that time the theme of socialist construction entered just as organically into the work of other Soviet poets, in a specific way in each case. Art grew together with the times, with the country.

In the cycles written between 1925-36, in *Yurga*, *Poems of Kakhetia*, *The Shadow of a Friend*, the advantages of Tikhonov's new, more perfected poetry make themselves felt more and more clearly.

Tikhonov sought to apply lyric methods to epic poetry. He wanted to write about an objective world, complicated, multiform and eloquent, and at the same time to preserve the entire sincerity and directness of his subjective, personal appraisals. At the same time, the "clumsiness", the emphasized difficulty disappeared, his verses again became light and beautiful, the natural freedom of breath and clarity of expression returned to him.

During the past ten years Tikhonov considerably widened the range of themes covered in his poetry. This now included pre-war Europe, history, love, World War II.

But while speaking of many and varied subjects, Tikhonov always remains true to himself. This individuality of style is not based on a special "manner", or "motif" repeated continually but on the integrity and scope of the poet's point of view.

The poet is both a direct participant in the events and their witness and observer. He takes part in the action and at the same time analyzes and watches.

This "second sight" persists in seemingly quite simple and obvious poems about the mountains and the hill people, poems written by Tikhonov just before the war and forming a part of the cycles *The Mountains* and *The Wondrous Alarum*. The poet is drawn to "the strong characters that are like avalanches, steeds rushing down precipices, the unreserved passions." But this integrity, "unreservedness of passions" are seen through the shrewd, analytical eyes of an advanced man of our epoch.

Tikhonov adheres to the same principles in his prose writings. His narrative is restrained and calm, but strong characters clash in it and passions rage. At the same time, Tikhonov is not afraid to write of the most prosaic subjects because he possesses the ability of revealing their hidden drama. Tikhonov formulates his view on the relations between art and life as follows: "... There are two truths in the world. The truth of existence, of life. A human being can be described with all his habits and customs, preserving photographic accuracy. The second truth is the truth of artistic conception which becomes a fine art—to transform existence in such a way that it leaves the limits of an individual case and becomes general, multiplane and of all times. Such is the task of the writer."

This multiplane nature distinguishes Tikhonov's Central Asian, Leningrad and Caucasian prose cycles. In his latest story *The Cavalcade* (see *Soviet Literature*, No. 7, 1946), romantic passions and ordinary daily life clash sharply. The breadth of the mountain landscape and wealth of every-day details; the integrity and directness of the heroes and the delicate analysis of the author and observer; these lend the narrative a unique charm, which is strengthened by the severe, laconic style inherent to Tikhonov's poetry and prose.

The ability to compare and analyze is inseparable from the ability to foresee. Time has shown how well Tikhonov understood and how correctly he foretold the future of Europe in his prose book *War* and in the book of travel poems *The Shadow of a Friend*.

War was written almost ten years before the outbreak of the World War II.

In his introduction, the author modestly limits his task to the elucidation of certain military-technological problems. However, in reality its significance is much wider. The book exposes the aggressiveness of German imperialism and the barbarity of those who were instrumental in carrying out its will. German "scientists" who affirm that America was not discovered by Columbus but by the Germans; German officers who consider themselves "sportsmen of war"—all these are figures from the recent, grim past. But Tikhonov pictured them in a story about World War I.

In *The Shadow of a Friend* hidden relations are also exposed, the future is seen in the present. Therefore, the ruins of Verdun and the gorgeous roses of Flanders, growing on the common graves, speak not so much of past battles as of those yet to come. The shadow lay over Europe. Tikhonov understood what this dark shadow of the coming storm presaged.

But Tikhonov's eyes also saw another, bright shadow—"The Shadow of a Friend"—the image of another, resistant, people's Europe. That is why there is nothing despondent in his stern, accusing verses. Portraying the public dances in Hyde Park, or the grand demonstrations in the Paris streets, or the anti-fascist underground worker—he sees in them the hope of humanity, believing in the future victory over imperialist aggression. Clear-sightedness is an excellent weapon! It is strange to think that the following verses were written in 1938 (from the lines for Cervantes' tragedy *Numancia*) addressed to the war incendiaries:

"And the gas you use, you shall be forced to swallow,
Over your own roof the bombers shall roar,
The grey shadow of the alarm shall blanch
your cheeks and hair,
And the wide tank tracks furrow your native
soil,
Red in the light of flaming cities.
And how the people will drag you to trial—
I shall learn later."

In his cycles of poems written before the war, the dark shadow of growing danger is always present side by side with the beautiful and pure world of bright and powerful nature, proud and free labour, passionate and restless.

love. A lyric cycle includes the poem *The Spaniards Have Retreated Beyond the Pyrenees*. The apparently restless poem *Night* with its description of a sleeping woman, a white fleet of boats, a blue pillar-box and the old lime trees ends unexpectedly on a line which, although only one, throws a new light upon the entire poem: "... And Paris burns the second night!"

In his poetry, short stories and features of the blockade Tikhonov was simultaneously the defender and the artist of Leningrad. Under those conditions the winged words acquired a particular, clearly-felt influence. Tikhonov, Olga Bergholz, Vera Inber, Alexander Prokofiev and other poets, living at the time in blockaded Leningrad, could see how their verses inspired the defenders of the city, how they strengthened its defences. One of the most wonderful works of that time was Tikhonov's poem *Kirov Is With Us*. The memory of the great statesman Sergei Kirov, builder, tribune, educator, leader, and man of great nobility is sacred to all Leningraders. And Tikhonov, faithful to the principles of militant poetry, led through the streets of the besieged city the image of the great citizen and soldier, the image of personified devotion and courage, nobility and purity.

In the same years he wrote *Leningrad Tales*. Many of them are imaginative stories telling of dramatic episodes in which the characteristic

features of Soviet people are revealed. In other stories Tikhonov applies in prose the method of poetical disclosure of reality. By an unexpected turn he suddenly reveals the true nature of things, shows their true meaning.

In peacetime Tikhonov's poetry was illuminated by the flames of the coming war. In the years of grim, armed struggle, he always remembered the coming peace. And this enabled him, already in the difficult year of 1941, to write the joyous, stirring lines about the third goblet that would be drunk to freedom in all corners of the earth when the fascist hell would be destroyed; it will be drunk to the day when wholesale slaughter will no longer mar the bright face of the Earth, and to the day when Man, having straightened his back, will drive away the shadow of care with a smile. . . .

Tikhonov always strove to make his poetry a part of life, that it should not contain "a drop of falsehood", that it should be inseparable "from our great days". In this *Wondrous Alarm*, in this constant creative restlessness, in his desire for the most exact and perfect expression of the truth of life, in this eternal change of his verses, in their movement along with time, lies the constancy of Tikhonov, the very essence of his poetry, the present and the future of his creative work.

JOSEPH GRINBERG

SOME REMARKS BY A TRANSLATOR OF SHAKESPEARE

In translating the plays of Shakespeare, as in my own work, I have tried to give a conception as complete as possible of the subject in hand, in this case the restatement of the original. I have set myself the task of seizing the substance of it with as much directness and vitality as I could and conveying it with the closest resemblance to the text.

In this work I had feared that the self-limitation it imposed might obscure my horizon, as usually happens in the case of those who work in narrow fields. But, convinced that real translation should stand firmly on its own feet, and not find an excuse for its own shortcomings in the alleged lameness of the original, I made the same demands upon myself as are required for every literary work of a writer's own.

Shakespeare's style has three distinctive peculiarities. His dramas are thoroughly realistic in spirit. Their presentation in colloquial language is natural in places written in prose or when fragments of the verse-dialogue are bound up with the action or movement. In the remaining instances the flow of his blank verse is of a heightened metaphorism, sometimes unnecessarily so, and then at the cost of plausibility.

Shakespeare's language of imagery is not homogenous. At times it is the loftiest poetry, demanding a corresponding attitude, at times it is plain rhetoric, overburdened with a score

of circumlocutions instead of the one apt word that was on the tip of the author's tongue but which eluded him in his haste. Be that as it may, Shakespeare's metaphorical language in its scope and rhetoric, at its heights and in its failures, is faithful to the main essential of every veritable allegory.

Metaphor is the natural outcome of the brevity of man's existence and immensity of the tasks he has planned for a much greater length of time. This incompatibility has obliged him to look upon things with the farsightedness of an eagle and express himself in momentary flashes, immediately understandable. This is poetry in itself.

Metaphor is the stenography of the larger personality, the shorthand of his spirit.

The tempestuous brushwork of Rembrandt, Michel-Angelo and Titian is not the outcome of well-considered choice. The insatiable thirst that urged them to paint the whole universe left them no time to paint otherwise. Impressionism has been an essential of art from time immemorial. It is the expression of man's spiritual wealth, filling his destiny to overflowing.

Distant stylistic extremities were harmonized in Shakespeare and he accommodated so many of them that it sometimes seems as though he was several authors in one. His prose is finished and polished. It is written by a comedian of genius, given to detail, the master

of the secret of conciseness and the gift of imitating and reproducing everything curious and extraordinary in the world.

In direct contrast to this is the realm of blank verse in Shakespeare. Its inward and outward chaos exasperated Voltaire and Tolstoy.

It frequently happens that some roles go through several stages of perfecting. A certain character will first speak in scenes written in verse, then suddenly burst into prose. In such cases the verse scenes create the impression of being preparatory, while the prose scenes are the conclusive ones.

Verses was Shakespeare's quickest and most direct form of expression. He resorted to it as the most rapid medium of recording his ideas. This was carried to a pitch where one may recognize in his verse-episodes rough sketches for prose.

The strength of Shakespeare's poetry lies in its powerful, irresistible and scattered sketchiness.

His rhythm is irrepressible and gusty. It lies at the basis of all that he has said and serves as an explanation and vindication of his words. This is, on the one hand, the laconicism peculiar to English versification of the ideal English iambic line, which embraces entire contrasts and, thanks to this, is winged as an utterance, and on the other hand—it is the rhythm of a free historical personality, setting up for itself, in obedience to the second commandment, no brazen image, and remaining as a result straightforward and terse.

This rhythm is most obvious in *Hamlet*. Here it has a treble purpose. It is applied as a means of characterizing certain personages, it materializes in the sound of the prevailing mood of the tragedy and maintains its themes throughout, it raises and smoothes over some of the coarser scenes in the drama.

The rhythmical characteristics in *Hamlet* are vivid and thrown into high relief. Polonius, or the king, or Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, speak in one way, while Laertes, Ophelia, Horatio and the rest speak in another way. The queen's credulity is discerned not only in her words, but in her manner of speaking in a singsong voice and drawing out the vowels.

But most striking of all is the rhythmic definiteness of Hamlet himself. It is so great that it seems to us concentrated in some imagined but actually non-existent rhythmic figure. The whole character of the man is in those brief lines of his. It is the pulse, almost palpable, of his entire person. Here we have the inconsistency in the movements, and the long stride of his decided gait, and the proud half-turn of the head. That is how the thoughts in his monologues leap and fly, that is how he flings his haughty and derisive replies right and left to the courtiers about him, and how he strains his eyes into the distance of the unknown, borne from whence his father's shade has called him once and may always speak again.

In the same way the music in general of *Hamlet* does not lend itself to quotation. It cannot be given as an isolated illustration of rhythm. Notwithstanding this impalpability, its presence merges in so sinister and material a fashion with the general web of the drama and is so much in keeping with its subject that, while conscious of the emptiness of such

tautology, one is involuntarily tempted to call it both spirit-seeking and Scandinavian. This music consists in the measured alternation of solemnity and anxiety. It thickens the atmosphere of things to the acme of density, yet permits the principal mood to stand out the more completely. In what does it consist precisely?

Hamlet has been spoken of long ere as a tragedy of will. But in what sense is this meant? Lack of will power was unknown in Elizabethan times. It interested no one. The character of Hamlet as Shakespeare drew him in such detail is obvious and cannot be reconciled with the conception of weak nerves. Shakespeare presents Hamlet as a prince of the blood, who never for a moment forgets his rights to the throne, a spoiled darling of an old court, and a rough diamond who by reason of his unusual gifts is self-opinionated. In the combination of features with which the author has endowed him there can be no suggestion of flabbiness, these qualities exclude it. Rather to the contrary, it is left to the audience to judge how great must be the range of Hamlet's plans and desires where such moral data exist, if they are to estimate correctly the scale of his sacrifices.

From the moment that the ghost appears, Hamlet denies himself in order to do the will of him who sent him. *Hamlet* is not a drama of a weak-willed character, but of duty and self-abnegation. When it is discovered that appearances and reality are irreconcilable, that there is a gulf between them, it is of no moment that the reminder of the falseness of the world comes in a supernatural form, and that the Ghost calls for revenge. It is far more important that chance has so willed it that Hamlet is chosen as the judge of his own time and the servant of a more distant time. *Hamlet* is a play of the high destiny, the drama of a vocation.

I have said that rhythm has a softening effect on certain angularities in the tragedy, which would have been unthinkable outside the circle of its harmony. Here is an example.

In the scene where Hamlet tells Ophelia to go into a nunnery, he is speaking to a girl who loves him and whom he spurns, speaking in the tone of the post-Byronic coxcomb, aping genius. His irony is not justified by his love, which he crushes down with pain. Let us see how this heartless scene is introduced. It is preceded by the famous monologue "To be or not to be", and the first words that they address to each other at the opening of the offensive scene still hold the fresh music of the monologue that has just died away. By the bitter loveliness and disorder in which the misunderstandings that burst from Hamlet pursue and jostle one another and pause, the monologue resembles the unexpected tentative trial chords of the organ, preceding the requiem. These are the most heartfelt and frenzied lines ever written on the anguish of the unknown at the gates of death, in strength of feeling they rise to the bitterness of Gethsemane.

It is not to be wondered at that the monologue preceded the cruelty of the denouement. It goes before it as the burial service goes before the burial. After that any inevitability may take place. All is redeemed, cleansed and raised not only by the thoughts in the mono-

logue but also by the warmth and purity of the tears that are felt in it.

If the role of music is so great in *Hamlet*, what shall we say then of *Romeo and Juliet*? The theme of the tragedy is the first love of youth, and its strength. Where is harmony and cadence to play a major part if not in a work like this? But it defrauds us. Its lyricism is not at all what we expected. Shakespeare does not write duets and arias. With the discernment of genius he takes a very different road.

The place of music in this play is negative. It embodies in tragedy the force of worldly lies and vanity which are hostile to lovers.

Previous to his acquaintance with Juliet, Romeo glows with a sentimental imagined passion for a certain Rosaline who is mentioned but is never shown on the stage. This is a romantic affectation in the spirit of the vogue of the time. It urges Romeo out to wander solitary in the streets at night while in the daytime he closes the shutters against the sunlight and sleeps. In the first scenes, while this state of things continues, Romeo's lines are written in unnatural, rhyming verse. He talks the highflown nonsense of the salons of his day in the most melodious form. But as soon as he sees Juliet at the feast, he stands dumbfounded before her and his faculty for expressing himself melodiously deserts him.

Love occupies among the emotions the place of an apparently-quelled cosmic force. Love is as simple and implicit as consciousness and death, nitrogen and uranium. It is not a state of mind but a fundamental principle of the world. This is the reason why it has a significance equal to creativeness, as something primary, a cornerstone. Love is not less than creativeness and its indications do not require art's manifestations. The highest that art may dream of is to listen to the voice of love, to its language, always new and unheard-of. It needs no melody, for in its soul live the verities, not sounds.

As in all Shakespeare's tragedies, the greater part of *Romeo and Juliet* is written in blank verse. The leading characters address each other in this form. But the metre is not emphasized and does not stand out. This is not declamation. The form does not hide the fathomlessly-modest content with its own self-admiration. This is the kind of poetry that breathes and must always breathe prose. The speech of the lovers is a model of what snatches of cautious conversation carried on in an undertone must be. That is exactly how conversation involving deadly risk and excitement should be at night. It is the future charm of *Victoria* and *War and Peace*, with the same purity and unpremeditated enchantment.

The scenes of the street brawl and the domestic bustle of the crowded house are deafening and go with a heightened rhythm. From outside the windows comes the ring of steel as the kinsmen of the Montagues and Capulets fight and blood is shed; before the succession of feasts the scullions and servants squabble in the kitchen, the knives of the cooks make a clatter, and to all this noise of killing and grilling, as though to the thunderous chords of an overpowering orchestra, a tragedy of tender emotion is played out, written, in the main, in the soundless whisper of the conspirators.

Shakespeare himself never divided up his

plays into acts and scenes. This idea was introduced by later publishers. It required no effort, as the plays lent themselves easily and naturally to it by reason of their inner articulation.

Though the texts were written by Shakespeare without a break that does not prevent their being distinguished by a severity of construction and development to which we are unaccustomed, which seems from our standpoint to be overdone and to have outlived its time.

This is true in particular of the middle parts of the dramas, which contain their thematic treatment. As a rule they include the third act and a certain part of the second and fourth. They take the same place as the spring-box in a piece of wound-up clockwork mechanism.

In the introductory and concluding parts of his dramas Shakespeare freely assembles the particularities of the plot and then, as lightly and easily, gets rid of the loose ends of the threads. His expositions and finales are full of life and are drawn from nature in the form of pictures rapidly succeeding each other with the greatest freedom in the world and an overwhelming richness of fantasy.

But in the middle parts, when the knot of the intrigue has been tied and untangling process begins, Shakespeare does not permit himself his usual freedom and in his false efforts shows himself to be the slave and child of his epoch.

His third acts are subordinated to the mechanism of intrigue to a degree unknown to the later drama which he himself taught boldness and truth. Too blind a faith in the might of logic and the reality of moral abstractions reigns in them. Sketches of people and actions with freely-shaded light and dark features are suddenly transformed into figures of valour and vices, constructed on chain and ladder-like systems. The stages through which the passions unfold arrange themselves in links like the syllogisms in reasoning. Here are the echoes of scholastics and the survivals of the medieval miracle plays. Here are those rare aspects of Shakespeare's verse from which a bridge may be thrown across to that French pseudo-classical tragedy with which he has always been so justly contrasted.

The beginnings and the endings are fourth-fifths of Shakespeare, the things that people laughed and cried over, the things that made his fame and set audiences talking of his faithfulness to life in contrast to the dead soullessness of the ancient classics.

But not infrequently it happens that incorrect formulation is given to correct observations, admiration is expressed for the "Mouse-trap" in *Hamlet*, or for the iron necessity with which some passion or the consequences of a crime are unfolded. People go into raptures over entirely false reasons. It is not the Mousetrap but the fact that Shakespeare is immortal even in places artificial that should arouse admiration. The fact that one-fifth of Shakespeare, representing his third acts, at times schematic and lifeless—does not detract from his greatness, should arouse our admiration. It is in spite of this and not because of it that he survives.

This statement must be accepted with the greatest reserve. But, notwithstanding the power of passion and genius concentrated in

Othello and the theatrical popularity of the play, the statement refers in a great measure to this tragedy.

One after another the dazzling waterfronts of Venice appear, the house of Brabantio, the arsenal; the meeting of the senate at night, Othello's easy telling of the attachment beginning between him and Desdemona. Then there is the picture of the storm at sea near the shores of Cyprus and the drunken brawl at night in the fortress. We pass over the intermediate stages and come to the well-known scene, where Emilia attires Desdemona for the night, and the singing of the even better-known song "Sing willow, willow, willow,"—the height of tragic simplicity and naturalness contrasting with the sinister colours of the finale.

But with a few turns of his key in the middle part Iago winds up, like an alarm clock the credulity of his victim, whereupon jealousy begins, like an old outworn mechanism, with much creaking and convulsive quivers, to whirl before us with overdone simplicity and detail taken too far. It may be asserted that this is the nature of the passion, that this is a tribute paid to the conventionalities of the stage, which demands clarity. This is probably the case. But the tribute would never have been so great had it not been paid with such perfection of technique by so great a genius of depth and of absoluteness.

Is it fortuitous that the principal character in the tragedy is black and that all he holds dear in life is white? What is the significance of this choice of colour? Does it mean that the right of every blood to human dignity is equal? No, Shakespeare's thoughts in that direction went much further.

Ideas on the equality of nations did not exist in his day. The all-embracing idea of Christianity concerning non-differentiation of another kind was in full force. This idea was not concerned with man's birth but with his conversion, with the thing that he served and to which he consecrated himself. To Shakespeare black Othello was historically a man and a Christian, and this is thrown into higher relief by Iago, a white, unconverted, prehistoric animal.

The hot-blooded piety of the black Othello foreshadows the religious devoutness of the martyrs and heroes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Othello, becomes a murderer from a religious

passion worked up to a pitch of fanaticism. He sacrifices Desdemona to his imagination, possessed by the idea that in punishing her on earth he will save her soul from eternal punishment beyond the grave.

Shakespeare has written tragedies that stand apart—as for example *Macbeth* and *King Lear* and form a world of their own, corresponding to nothing definite in the world. There are comedies in which fantasy and inspiration present an undivided realm, the cradle of future romanticism. There are the chronicles of English history, the ardent glorification of country, pronounced by the greatest of her sons. Some of the events that Shakespeare described in these had their sequence in the events of his own time and he could not take a sober impartial view of them.

Thus, despite the inner realism prevailing throughout his work, it would be vain to seek objectivity in plays of the types enumerated. This may be found in his Roman plays.

Julius Caesar, and in particular *Anthony and Cleopatra*, were not written out of love of art, or for poetry's sake. They are the fruit of the study of the unembellished daily round. This study is the highest passion of every artist. This study led to the writing of the "physiological novel" of the 19th century and constituted the still more incontrovertible fascination of Chekhov, Flaubert and Leo Tolstoy.

But why should the inspiration of realism be such remote antiquity as ancient Rome? There is nothing surprising in this. It was the remoteness of his subject that permitted Shakespeare to call things by their real names. He could say anything he thought fit in a political, moral or any other connection. Here was an alien and distant world that had long since ceased to exist, a world that was now shut in upon itself, explained, and immobile. What desire could this world evoke? The desire to draw it.

Anthony and Cleopatra is the most realistic and mature and, it may even be found, the best of Shakespeare's plays. It is written out of love for life in the commonest, most hackneyed and colloquial sense of the expression. Shakespeare has shown this feeling in the example of two giants.

It is the romance of a debauchee and a courtesan. Shakespeare describes their debauchery in the tone of an old mystery play, as



Covers for Pasternak's translations

becomes a true bacchanalia in the antique conception of it.

Historians have told us that Anthony and his boon companions, and Cleopatra with those of her court who were nearest to her looked for no benefit from the debauchery which was raised to a cult with them. Foreseeing the inevitable end, they endowed each other long before this with the names of immortal suicides and vowed to die together.

Thus the tragedy closes. At the decisive moment, death appears as that delineator who puts in the general outlines that what had been lacking in the narrative. Against the background of battle and fire, treachery and military defeat, we bid farewell twice to the principals. In the fourth act the hero falls upon his own sword, in the fifth the heroine takes her own life.

Shakespeare is integral, everywhere true to himself. He is bound by his vocabulary. Under various names he brings some characters from one play to another and sings the same song in many keys. Among these paraphrases his repetitions within a brief period stand out, especially within the boundaries of one and the same work.

Hamlet tells Horatio that he is a true man, not a weathercock, that he cannot be played upon as upon a flute. A few pages further on he suggests to Guildenstern that he should play the flute in the same allegorical sense.

In the First Player's tirade against the cruelty of Fortune who permitted the slaughter of Priam, the gods are appealed to that they may take away the symbol of her power, her wheel, break it and fling the parts down from heaven to the fiends. A few pages further on, Rosencrantz, in a conversation with the king, compares the majesty of the monarch to "a massy wheel fixed on the summit of the highest mount," which when it falls will draw ruin upon everything in its path.

Juliet seizes the dagger, at dead Romeo's side, and stabs herself with the words: "Oh happy dagger, 'Tis in thy sheath, there rust and let me die."

A few lines further on her father, old Capulet, exclaims in similar words that the dagger has mistaken its place and instead of being in its sheath on Romeo's belt, is mis-sheathed in Juliet's bosom. And so we find these repetitions at every step. What does this mean?

I translated Shakespeare in equal parts. Day by day, step by step, as the servant of the text I followed in the steps once taken by its master. It does not matter to what degree I was successful in reproducing his movements, and to what degree the results of my day corresponded to the amount he did at one sitting. The important thing is that both in this and in the other the labour was of necessity broken up into separate days and parts and that in both cases their order coincided.

Therefore, whenever I came upon the repetitions of which I have spoken, a similarity of situations unusual for us animated them. With involuntary tangibility the circumstances arose before me, and also the conception of who and under what conditions, could serve as an example of such forgetfulness in the course of a few days.

Then the definitiveness of the person who

lived in history, and was called Shakespeare and was a genius, was revealed to me. In the course of twenty years, thirty-six plays, each of five acts, not counting two long poems and a collection of sonnets, had been written by this person. This meant that, having to write at this rate two plays a year, he had no time to read them over, and thus was in the habit of forgetting what he had done the previous day and repeating it in his haste.

I never doubted the data of Shakespeare's biography. I used to wonder formerly why it was found necessary to complicate its simplicity and probability with a useless tangle of invented mysteries, reshufflings and their alleged discoveries. But when during my work on the texts I was constantly encountering such evidence of life as these signs of absentmindedness and fatigue, my wonder at the Baconian theory knew no bounds.

Was it reasonable, I thought, that Rutland, Bacon or Southampton would disguise themselves so clumsily, and, hiding with the aide of a cipher or through a go-between from Elizabeth and her time, betray themselves so incautiously before the eyes of the rest? What secret intention or guile could be discerned in the embodiment of impetuosity that this definite, historically-existent person, was a person who was not ashamed to make mistakes, who yawned from weariness in the face of the centuries, and knew less about himself than secondary school pupils know about him today. His strength was revealed to me in the discovery of his weaknesses.

I pondered over it. Why exactly did mediocrity occupy itself with such partiality with the laws of the great? Mediocrity has its own conception of an artist, an inactive, pleasant, but false conception. It starts from the admission that Shakespeare ought to be a genius after its own understanding of that word and applies its own measure to him, and Shakespeare does not fit.

His life proves to be too obscure and humdrum for such a fame. He had no library of his own, and his signature to his last will and testament is too crooked. It seems suspicious that one and the same person could know so much about the earth, the grasses and herbs, animal life and all the hours of the day and night, as only the people know them, and at the same time be so much a man of his time in questions of history, law and diplomacy, and know so well the court and its morals and customs. They marvel and marvel, forgetting that so great an artist as Shakespeare is everything human, taken together, at its wellspring.

And we are struck by the fact that, notwithstanding the unbounded range of all he accomplished, he yet had time to live in the world. And we would not be surprised if we learned that for lack of leisure this creative spirit fell slightly short in its embodiment, and that he just missed being wholly human.

One period of Shakespeare's biography that leaves us in no doubt at all is his youth.

That was when he had just come up to London, an obscure young provincial from Stratford. Very likely he stayed awhile outside the city boundaries to which the carters drove. There must have been something in the nature of a suburban posting station,

a collection of hosteleries, and inns there. Since arrivals and departures went on all day long, the suburb must have been as busy as our railway stations day and night, and had no lack of ponds and shady groves, vegetable gardens, coach-houses and places of entertainment, public gardens and fairgrounds. There might possibly have been theatres too. The gilded youth of London came here for amusement.

The newcomer was at that time a man without any definite occupation, but with an unusually definite star. In this he believed. This faith alone had brought him from the provinces to London. As yet he did not know what part he was to play some day, but his feeling for life told him that he was to play it in an unheard-of and incredible way.

Everything he took up had been done before his day—others had written plays and poems, acted on the stage, done services for debauchee-aristocrats, and by every means in their power tried to rise in the world. But no matter what this young man took up, he felt a tide of such stupendous strength that the very best he could do was to transgress established custom and do things all over again after his own fashion.

Before his time art was regarded as something artificial, unnatural and bearing no resemblance to life. This dissimilarity to life was an obligatory feature of art, it was resorted to in order to conceal under false conventionality the inability to draw and feebleness of spirit. And Shakespeare had so true an eye and so sure a hand that it was of immediate profit to him to upset this state of things.

He understood how much he stood to gain if, from the generally-accepted distance he approached life on his own feet and not on stilts, and, entering the contest of endurance with it, forcing it to lower its eyes first before the persistence of his own unwinking steady gaze.

There was a certain company of actors, writers and their patrons who wandered from tavern to tavern, annoying strangers, constantly risking their heads, and making fun of everything in the world. The most daring of them, who went unharmed (because he got off easily in everything) the most reckless and yet the most sober (even in his cups he kept cool), the one who aroused the most uproarious laughter, and was at the same time the most restrained, was that melancholy youth who was striding into the future in seven-league boots.

Perhaps some corpulent old glutton like Falstaff made one of that company of youth. Perhaps he was simply a biographical landmark embodied in human form, later a guidepost at the turning that led back to reminiscences of that time.

It was a time dear to Shakespeare not only for its bygone gaiety. Those were the days of the birth of his realism, the realism that saw the light, not in the solitude of a study, but in the untidy disordered morning room of an inn, charged with life as with gunpowder. Shakespeare's realism is not the profundity of the profligate settled into sobriety, not the "wisdom" (how I dislike that word!) of ma-

ture experience. Shakespeare's serious art, not buffoonery, but a tragic and substantial art, originated in the sense of success and power at the time of those early follies, full of crazy inventiveness, audacity, enterprise and deadly risk.

Shakespeare has no tragedy and comedy in the pure form, but a genre that is something in between, a mingling of these elements. It responds more to the true face of life in which horrors and enchantment are also mingled. This conformity of tone was placed to his especial credit long ago by England's remarkable critic, Samuel Johnson and in the most recent times by a remarkable contemporary poet, T. S. Eliot.

In the tragic and the comic Shakespeare saw, not only the lofty, common and everyday, the ideal and the real; he looked upon them as something similar to the major and minor in music. Placing material for the drama in the desired order, he employed the alternation of poetry and prose, and their transitions as musical harmony.

Their alternation constitutes the main distinction of Shakespearean drama, the soul of his theatre, that broadest of hidden rhythms of thoughts and moods of which we have spoken in the notes on *Hamlet*.

Shakespeare resorted to these contrasts regularly. In the form of these frequently-changing scenes, sometimes facetious, sometimes tragic, all his dramas are written. But in one particular instance he uses this treatment with unusual persistence.

At the brink of Ophelia's freshly-dug grave the audience gives way to sidesplitting mirth over the profundities of the gossiping grave-diggers. At the moment when Juliet's body is carried out, a boy from the servants' hall makes game of the musicians invited for the wedding, and they bargain with the old nurse who sees them out. Cleopatra's suicide is preceded by the appearance of an Egyptian half-wit with snakes and his inept utterances on the uselessness of reptiles. It is not unlike Leonid Andreyev or Maeterlinck!

The nineteenth century in Russia and Europe was called the Shakespearean or the Hamlet age because of the immense influence he had on this age. It was disseminated gradually and yielded various fruits at various times.

Shakespeare was the father and teacher of realism. The significance he had for Pushkin, Hugo and others is generally known. The German Romantics studied him. One of the Schlegels translated him, the other evolved from Shakespeare's works his own theory of Romantic irony. Shakespeare was the forerunner of the symbolism of Goethe in Faust, and in the teaching of the transformation of organic and creative form.

It is in this spirit that he makes the element of narrowness and triviality gnash its teeth and writhe in the funeral solemnity of his finales.

Its invasion removes to a greater distance the already very distant and inaccessible secret of the end and death. The respectful distance—at which we stand on the threshold of the lofty and the formidable, increases, somewhat. For the thinker and artist the last

situations do not exist, they are all the next but the last. Shakespeare seems afraid that the audience believes too firmly in the suspected unconditionality and finality of the denouement. By interruptions in the tone at the end he restores the endlessness that

has been transgressed. In the spirit of all new art, opposed to the fatalism of antiquity, he merges the transitoriness and mortality of the sign in the immortality of significance.

BORIS PASTERNAK

NEW BOOKS

A PLAY ABOUT A KAZAKH SCHOLAR

Sabit Mukanov. *The Thread of Ariadne*. (Chokan Velikhanov). A Historical Tragedy in Four Acts and Six Scenes and Epilogue. Translated from the Kazakh by V. Shklovsky. Art Publishing House. Moscow-Leningrad. 124 pages.

The Thread of Ariadne is a dramatized biography of the eminent 19th-century Kazakh scholar Chokan Velikhanov who wrote on the geography, ethnography, history and folklore of the Central Asiatic peoples. He was a Kazakh by birth but wrote in Russian; he was a friend and pupil of the famous Russian geographer Semenov Tian-Shansky, he was closely connected with revolutionary circles, organized by the writer Petrashevsky in St. Petersburg in the first half of the 19th century; he corresponded with the poet Apollon Maikov and with Dostoyevsky. Velikhanov spent most of his life in Russia and returned to his native land only in 1861, full of ambitious ideas to work for the enlightenment of his people. Here he came in collision with the nationalistic tendencies of the Kazakh gentry on the one hand, and the colonial policy of oppression, exercised by the tsarist government, on the other. Velikhanov believed that he was destined to liberate his native land. He was elected Khan but his election was not confirmed by the Russian government. This blow, coinciding with a personal misfortune (he was not allowed to marry the girl he loved), undermined his health and he died in complete solitude.

The author deals with the most vivid episodes in Velikhanov's biography: his life in Omsk where he studied, his return to his native land, elections, and his love for the girl Aisha, a gifted student of Eastern poetry and literature.

The interesting plot, the historically authentic description of the epoch, of the customs of the Kazakh people, the different types of Kazakhs and finally, the excellent portrait of the central character, a wise, gifted, educated Kazakh, makes this tragedy an outstanding work of Soviet Kazakh literature.

PRINCIPLES OF THE THEORY OF LITERATURE

Leonid Timofeyev. *The Theory of Literature*. Pedagogical Publishing House. Moscow. 327 pages.

The book has been written by a well-known literary theoretician and is intended for students of Faculties of Literature.

The first part deals with the general principles of the theory of literature, emphasis being laid on its perceptive meaning, and on the concept of "imagery" in its two aspects: imagery in speech, which gives it beauty and concreteness; and imagery as a method used by the artist to depict life. The analysis of the concept of "imagery" is given in its historical development, tracing it from ancient to contemporary literature.

The second part is devoted to literary works.

The third part of the book, *The Literary Process*, discusses the various genres as well as the creative process of various writers. Thus the author analyzes the specific features of epics, lyrics, satire and drama, taking his examples mainly from Russian literature. He analyzes in detail the works of Tolstoy and Chekhov.

Timofeyev's vivid and precise style and his profound literary erudition make this a valuable book for literary scholars and writers.

A NOVEL FOR THE YOUNG

Ruvim Fraerman. *Distant Voyage*. A novel. Children's Publishing House. Moscow. 254 pages.

R. Fraerman's new book tells of the "dear green banks of childhood from which we depart for the distant voyage into life," of the "good sailors", the young girls, almost children, who are preparing to sail from "the sacred bay"—the school. Fraerman, author of one of the best Soviet books for the young *First Love or the Wild Dog Dingo*, has written another romantic story of the first storms which his seventeen-year-old heroines, Soviet schoolgirls, encountered in the difficult years of the war. *Distant Voyage* deals with all the problems which so deeply stir and disturb youth and adolescence, the problems of love and friendship, of duty, sacrifice and happiness. Two friends, Anka and Galya, look upon life differently, but traversing different roads, they reach the same goal.

Anka is simple and impulsive. Without hesitating she joins in the war effort of the Soviet people, working selflessly in the rear. Anka's "heart of gold" helps her always to choose the right path. Galya, gifted, but more sophisticated, is the pride and hope of their school. The death of her father at the front

leaves a deep mark on her life. She tries to shut herself off from the world.

The narrative is built around Galya's striving to overcome her lack of stamina and her "weak heart."

Distant Voyage is written by a man who is no longer young but who loves youth, its problems and excitement, its sublime impulses.

A BIOGRAPHY OF A RUSSIAN ADMIRAL

M. Yakhontov. *Ships Put to Sea. Naval Publishing House. Moscow-Leningrad. 392 pages.*

Yakhontov's book is a biographical novel about the prominent Russian Admiral Ushakov (1743-1817), hero of the second war between Russia and Turkey (1787-1791), which resulted in Russia becoming firmly established on the northern coast of the Black Sea.

The novel deals with Ushakov's life from the beginning of his naval career when, still a captain of first rank, he showed his exceptional strategical gifts, to the two great events in his career—the victory of 1790-1791 over the Turkish fleet and the victory of 1799 over Napoleon's fleet when Ushakov, commanding the Russo-Turkish navy, liberated the Ionian Islands and cleared the fortress on the island of Corfu.

The author shows Ushakov as a highly gifted seaman, a fearless resourceful commander, stern, but sensitive towards people, deeply unhappy and lonely in his personal life. Optimism never left him, his words, with which the author ends the book, might have served as an epigraph to his whole biography: "There is nothing finer than life—to live, love, suffer, die, but nevertheless fight and create. Herein lies probably the true and greatest happiness of man."

THE STORY OF A REVOLUTIONARY

Sergei Mstislavsky. *The Rook, Harbinger of Spring. Young Guard Publishing House. Moscow. 344 pages.*

Mstislavsky belonged to the older generation of Soviet writers. He took part in the Russian revolutionary movement, began to write as early as 1905, but gained wide popularity only in the years of Soviet power when he published his novel *The Roof of the World*. The novel is based on the author's personal experiences during a journey he made as a student of ethnography to the Pamirs at the beginning of the century. The merit of the book lies not only in the skill of the narrative—the author combines romantic, almost fairy-tale motifs with a realistic description of the habits and customs prevailing on the borders of the tsarist Russian Empire, but also in its anti-racist idea (the book was published in 1928). The hero of the novel comes to the conclusion that the skull he found, an ancient Aryan specimen, does not differ from that of a distant ancestor of the Eastern and Semitic peoples.

Mstislavsky's novel *In Blood* (1930) dealing with the events of 1905 (adapted for the stage

by the Vakhtangov Theatre) made the author still more popular. In his works Mstislavsky again and again returns to the theme of the Russian revolution.

Mstislavsky's latest novel *The Rook, Harbinger of Spring*, again deals with the 1905 Revolution, and with Nikolai Bauman who was a comrade-in-arms of Lenin. "The Rook" was Bauman's party name given to him for his "flights" over the border, as liaison officer between Lenin, who then lived abroad, and the Russian workers. Nikolai Bauman was prominent in the Russian labour movement and played a leading part in the Moscow uprising of 1905. Bauman's first appearance in the novel is in 1902, when the Bolsheviks were carrying on a determined fight against opportunists of all kinds.

The Party newspaper *Iskra*, published abroad, was intended by Lenin to bring together and unite the vanguard of revolutionaries. Among the first distributors of *Iskra* and propagandists of Lenin's ideas, was Bauman.

Recalling Lenin's words: "Revolution is the lot of the strong," Mstislavsky ably portrays the dawn of the labour movement. To be a professional revolutionary requires great spiritual strength and great stamina. The writer portrays Nikolai Bauman as a bold revolutionary, incorruptible, fearless and unflinching in his convictions.

The book describes the daring escape of eleven Leninists from the tsarist prison in Kiev in 1902 with Bauman and Maxim Litvinov among them.

The novel ends with the Moscow uprising of 1905. Nikolai Bauman was killed by a police agent during the demonstration. Thousands of workers followed the body to the Vagankov cemetery. "Over this grave," writes Mstislavsky, "the first shot was fired against the White Guards in the October days of 1917."

GREAT RUSSIAN PHYSIOLOGISTS

Ivan Sechenov. *Autobiographical Notes. Ilya Mechnikov. Reminiscences. Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. Publishing House. Moscow.*

Ivan Sechenov, the "father of Russian physiology" and author of the famous treatise *Reflexes of the Brain*, and Ilya Mechnikov, whose works on the problems of old age and longevity strengthened still further the phagocytic theory of immunity, were connected by long years of close friendship and scientific collaboration. The simultaneous publication of the two books containing the autobiographical notes and articles of these two great scientists, is therefore most appropriate.

The well-known Russian botanist and Darwinist, Timiryazev, in his *Development of Natural Science in Russia in the Sixties*, gave a brilliant characterization of his teacher and friend, Sechenov, the founder of the school of Russian physiologists. "Hardly any of his contemporaries had such a wide field of vision in the sphere of personal observation, beginning with purely physical research such as the dissolution of gases and ending with research in the field of the neurophysiology and strictly scientific psychology... If we add to this the clear, brilliant and simple form

in which he expressed his thoughts, we begin to understand his enormous influence on Russian science and ideas."

Beginning his notes with recollections of childhood, school and university years, Sechenov devotes part of his book to meetings with the greatest European scientists of his time—Johannes Müller, Ludwig Helmholtz, Dubois Reimond. He tells the history of his famous discovery in 1862 of the retardatory centers in the brain, and of his scientific work in the Petersburg and Moscow universities. At seventy-four he still continued his scientific research in metabolism, physiology of movements and psycho-physiology.

Mechnikov's *Reminiscences* are no less interesting. This is a collection of his articles and notes written at various periods of his life. They include his *Personal Observations* which he continued to write on his deathbed at the age of seventy-one.

The recollections of Mechnikov, of his meetings with the famous Russian embryologist A. Kovalevsky, with Pasteur, Lister, Koch, Sechenov and Leo Tolstoy are of particular interest. The book also includes the chapter *A History of a Scientist—the Youthful Pessimist Who Became an Optimist*, an autobiographical essay taken from Mechnikov's *Studies in Optimism*. An appendix to the book contains the scientist's autobiography written when he was awarded the Nobel Prize, and his correspondence with such famous scientists as Pasteur, Behr and de Frise.

An interesting article by Mechnikov *A Day With Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana*, written after Tolstoy's death, is reprinted from an old newspaper. Mechnikov, the materialist, was a great admirer of the brilliant writer, but he thoroughly disagreed with Tolstoy's philosophy. His visit to Yasnaya Polyana in 1909 was dictated by a wish to settle controversial problems. However, each of them "persisted in retaining his own views."

In his recollections of Tolstoy, Mechnikov concludes his article with the following prophetic words: "One can predict that humanity will not follow Tolstoy in its quest of truth. However, when it will have overcome its present plight it will rise to a higher level, and will devote itself to science and art to a degree we can only dream of today. Then only will mankind fully appreciate Tolstoy's great genius, whose equal it is difficult to find in the history of literature."

A BOOK ON ENGLISH ART

Professor Boris R. Vipper. *English Art*. A short historical essay. Published by Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. Moscow. 65 pages.

This is the first book in Russian devoted to the history of British art. The author tells of the principal stages in the development of English art and of its contribution to world culture as a whole.

Professor Vipper traces the history of British art from the ancient megalithic constructions (Stonehenge) and brings it up to the modern cartoonists. This part of the study occupies fifty pages, yet the book is neither a dry chronicle nor a superficial popularization. Good literary style is combined with

precision and strict logic of a historical narrative.

Professor Vipper pays prime attention to the analysis of the specific national features in British art. While recognizing the place of British art of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century in world culture, the author is of the opinion that "English art throughout its history has produced no genius in architecture, sculpture or painting." Incidentally, this opinion is held by outstanding art authorities of Britain too.¹

The reason for this Professor Vipper sees in the peculiarity of Britain's social history resulting in a certain lack of "picturesqueness" and "unplasticity" of British culture that won its fame mainly in the fields of literature and science.

The chapters devoted to Gothic art and portrait painting of the 18th century are of special interest. Speaking of English Gothic art the author stresses its originality showing that it had organically grown out from the local style traditions.

"One could assert confidently," writes Professor Vipper, "that English Gothic is quite an independent branch of the general European style with a perfectly original constructive and decorative concept which combined the elements of ancient Celtic and Anglo-Saxon building methods with the influence of the Northern French architecture introduced by the Normans."

Professor Vipper points out that the originality of Britain's medieval art concept manifested itself not only in architecture but also in other fields—in monumental sculpture and painting. In reviewing English portrait-painting of the 18th century Professor Vipper includes among the greatest painters not only Reynolds and Gainsborough, but also Hogarth, who is often spoken of as a master of social satire and political cartoonist though he has to his credit several exceptionally fine paintings which excel in power of penetration and of execution.

Professor Vipper analyzes the works of the great English and European landscape painters Turner and Constable, revealing the peculiarities of their world outlook and their artistic creed. Other chapters discuss such genres of the 18th and 19th centuries English art as historical painting, caricature, reproductions, illustrations and graphics.

Special chapters are devoted to the British applied art (*English Gardens* and *Art in Daily Life*).

Throughout his study, Professor Vipper aims at specific features of the British art concept. He comes to the conclusion that the chief feature is the tendency to empiric thinking, the sense of reality and vigorous sensualism. This "enabled English art at certain historical periods to reach creative heights, and inspire the continent with daring and novel artistic ideas, and create an art of worldwide importance," states Professor Boris Vipper.

¹ Fry Roger, *Reflections on British Painting*. London, Faber and Faber, 1934; Charles Johnson, *English Painting From the 7th Century to the Present Day*, London, G. Bell and Sons, 1934, and others.

Lev Kassil. *My Dear Boys*. Children's Publishing House. Moscow. 71 pages.

"Valour, Loyalty, Labour, Victory." is the motto inscribed on the cover of this book. It is the leitmotif of Lev Kassil's story for children: *My Dear Boys*.

Lev Kassil has been known as a children's writer for many years. His characters and his readers are usually of about the same age, schoolchildren, who are making their first steps in life. But Kassil addresses his works not only to young children but also to the child that lives in all of us till the end of our lives.

The charm of Kassil's writing lies in his ability to reveal the complex inner world of the child and in his gift of painting realistic pictures of people and nature. The biographical tales *Conduct* and *Shvambria* brought the author deserved fame. His other books *Cheremysk, Brother of a Hero*, *The Great Resistance*, *The Goal-Keeper of the Republic* and others are popular with the children.

Kassil's latest book *My Dear Boys*, or *The Commandos of Fishermen's Bay* is a charming story about youngsters—trade school pupils and their friends, young cadets of the Baltic Navy.

The action is laid in the small town of Zatonk, on the Volga near Stalingrad at the time of the German invasion. The trade school pupils who are working as apprentices in a shipyard and the young cadets from Leningrad become fast friends.

Interesting games follow the day's work and enchanting fantasy grows imperceptibly into the world of reality.

Kassil portrays children with great affection. Sturdy Kapka Butyrev, the "head" of his small family (his mother has perished in German captivity, his father is in the army), a boy with clever hands, and a noble heart; the brave cadet Victor Stashuk; Valya Cheremysk, "the historian" of his home town Zatonk; the athlete Timka Timson, and many others.

They are all loyal comrades and dreamers.

In their make-believe land of "Blue Mountains" there lives a happy and industrious people, skilful craftsmen whose produce—mirrors and swords, are famous throughout the world. They fight Fanfaron, the perfidious king of the island, and his allies—the Winds, which have devastated the country. In the end the artisans win. "Valour, Loyalty, Labour and Victory," their Motto triumphs over evil. In order to become a hero of the land of the "Blue Mountains" one must accomplish some gallant deed. Kira Stepushkin, nicknamed "the Alarm Clock of the Volcanos", is the best collector of metal scrap; Kolya Kudryashov called "Smoke and Fire" is famed for his care of the toddlers. Some of them are known as chess players, as naturalists, etc.

The friendship of the children is "consecrated by blood." The small working boys and the cadets take part in the extermination of a German airborne group which had landed on the Isle of Comradeship, the isle where the Zatonk children used to gather for their games. Here Kapka Butyrev, the clever me-

chanic, in single combat kills the German machine gunner.

Lev Kassil writes emotionally and simply. His book is a tribute to the Soviet children in the grim days of the war.

BOOK ABOUT A GREAT UZBEK POET

Aibek. *Nava'i*. A novel. Translated from the Uzbek. Soviet Writer Publishing House. Moscow. 576 pages.

Central Asia in the second half of the 15th century. A stormy epoch full of stirring events. The great Empire of Timur (Tamerlane) had crumbled. Bloody wars were breaking out between his numerous descendants—the Timurides.

One of the larger states that remained under power of the Timurides was Khorasan with its capital Herat, which by that time had outshone Timur's splendid capital, Samarkand.

"Herat is the eye and the light of all cities, If the world is the body, then Herat is the soul,"

one of the contemporary poets wrote. Herat was the centre of culture in Central Asia in the second half of the 15th century; the arts flourished and literature developed both in the Persian language with its century-old traditions and in the Uzbek language the first writer in which was the great poet Alisher Nava'i (1441-1501).

Aibek's novel, which received the Stalin Prize for 1945, deals with Alisher Nava'i and his time; it depicts the events, the people and the conditions under which the great poet lived.

Nava'i's biography can be briefly summarized as follows: descending from a family that for generations had supplied officials to the State, Nava'i was close to the Timuride court; from childhood he was friendly with one of the distant descendants of Timur, Sultan Hussein. He was frequently in trouble on account of the continuous feudal strife between the descendants of Timur, and because of court intrigues.

Apart from being a poet, Nava'i was a gifted statesman. He was Grand Vizier under Sultan Hussein for several years. "If you are human, do not call him human who does not care for his people," was Nava'i's maxim, the demand put up to the ruler of the state.

His progressive ideas brought him numerous enemies; more than once he and his friends suffered disgrace. "Life was hard from early youth to old age," wrote Nava'i, "I suffered because of national events, of calamities sent down by the Lord, and of the hypocrisy of men."

Nava'i left a very rich literary heritage, more than one hundred thousand lines of verse, amongst which is a *Hamsa* (Quintet) consisting of the poems: *Blissful Wonderment*, *Leila and Mejnun*, *Farhad and Shirin*, *The Seven Plants* and *The Wall of Iskander*; the poem, *The Language of Birds* and numerous works in prose. His book *Contest of Two Languages* is of special interest; in contrast to the then existing opinion, Nava'i shows that

the Turkič language (as old Uzbek was then called) is not inferior to Persian, and that fine literature can be written in it. "This language had been imprisoned and neglected," Nava'i stated.

Aibek paints a vivid picture of the struggle between the reactionary supporters of Persian's superiority over the Uzbek language on the one hand, and the impassioned champions of the native tongue, on the other. The novel opens with Sultan Hussein's ascent to the throne after a long struggle, and Nava'i's return from Samarkand, where he was in exile, to Herat, and closes with the poet's death. The book deals with Nava'i in his maturity, but we also get a picture of the poet's childhood and youth from skilfully interwoven stories about him told by the people, and from Nava'i's own recollections.

The material is ably presented by the au-

thor: historical episodes grow into huge artistic canvases. Aibek leads the reader through the court of the Sultan, to the Vizier's divan and student lodgings, through prison cells and the huts of the poor. Together with him we walk through the multi-coloured streets of Herat, attend an assembly of state officials and the military council, are present at luxurious feasts of Hussein and at gatherings of poets.

The complicated political intrigues, the struggle of religious and philosophical tendencies, the interrelations of the various strata of society are convincingly and fascinatingly told by Aibek.

Nava'i as poet and statesman has long attracted the attention of Russian and Western-European scholars, but Aibek's novel is the first to combine a genuine sense of history with artistic truth.

MAYAKOVSKY'S SECOND PROFESSION

When little Volodya Mayakovsky was brought one day—it was at Kutaisi in Georgia in the year 1902 or 1903—to the painter A. Krasnukha, to be taught drawing, Krasnukha agreed to teach the boy free of charge, so talented did he find his prospective pupil.

Mayakovsky's artistic gifts were indeed remarkable. But even before he had time to give himself seriously to study, the boy had to turn his gifts to practical purposes.

After his father's death the family moved to Moscow where Volodya began making wooden Easter eggs, painting them, and selling them to art shops at 10 or 15 kopeks a piece.

Real study was to come later, after the fifteen-year-old Mayakovsky had already done his bit in Bolshevik underground work, and been arrested for anti-government activities. He spent about a year in prison.

He had begun to study painting in a private art studio, but when he applied to the Petersburg Academy of Art he was refused admittance because he could not produce the required certificate as to his political reliability. After several attempts he enrolled with the School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture at Moscow.

It is interesting to note that Mayakovsky's first public appearance was as an artist and not as a poet. This was in 1911 at the funeral of Valentine Serov. Speaking in the name of his fellow-students, he said that "the best way of honouring the memory of the dead artist was to follow his canons."

If Mayakovsky never became a professional painter, however, it was because he was soon to find another, and lasting, place for himself in the world of poetry. He had entered the Moscow Art School to study painting but left it a poet.

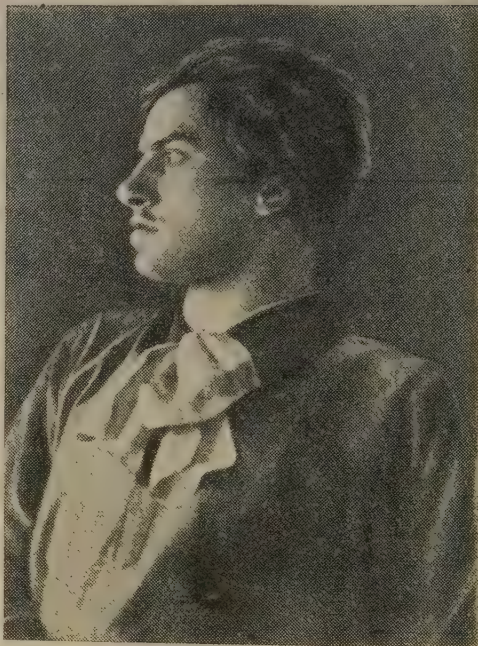
Nevertheless he did not give up painting, he still loved it. For some years, at least, it was the only means young Mayakovsky had of making a living.

He liked making portrait-sketches of his friends, working sometimes in charcoal, sometimes in pen-and-ink, or pencil, or even a match, or a cigarette stump, working rapidly, and producing faithful and clever likenesses. Often he would draw caricatures for humorous magazines. During World War I he drew anti-German cartoons and witty picture postcards with verses by himself.

And although in his pictures he would sometimes follow the great Repin or the French painter Delonaye, he was no timid disciple in his art but painter with freedom and confidence, expressing himself in his drawing as easily as he did in his verses.

He never lost touch with the graphic arts even when poetry had become his career.

His first verses were written when he was



Vladimir Mayakovsky when he was studying at a school of art

still grappling with problems of drawing, perspective, colour and form, learning to see the world in lines and planes; in chiaroscuro and changing tints. All this is clearly reflected in the very fabric of his verse with its picturesque images and colourful conception of the universe.

His first verses *Night, Morning, The Port, Street Scene, Signboards, Theatres* are city landscapes visually and colourfully described. A close perusal will show that nature has been crystallized and transformed by the penetrating eye of the painter. These poems are no mere descriptions of a city, but canvases whereon a city, seen by an artist and recorded by a poet, are depicted.

There was a time when Mayakovsky, already a poet, had not yet ceased to be a painter. Speaking of that time one cannot but recall David Burlyuk, Mayakovsky's fellow-student at the Art School, his friend and councillor. Burlyuk, too, was both an artist and a poet, and although he eventually took up painting as a profession, he continued to write poetry.

Burlyuk's influence over Mayakovsky was, indeed, great. At that time Mayakovsky needed environment, a public, friendly criticism,



Head of a boy. Drawing by V. Mayakovsky

and companionship. His first guide in art was Burlyuk. But Burlyuk was much more than that. A man ten years older than Mayakovsky, of versatile erudition, endowed with creative powers, he was to Mayakovsky friend, collaborator and teacher all in one.

From the very first Burlyuk recognized in Vladimir Mayakovsky a great poet. He directed his reading, translated to him the works of Corbiere, Verlaine, Rembaud; trained his taste and his ear, made him write poetry, was in fact his literary nurse. Urging him along his path of a poet he kept him within the circle of artistic interests, took him about to exhibitions, and made him paint.

It was the time when the new Russian art was just beginning to break its way through and when every step made by its young advocates seemed to them a matter of vital principle and polemic importance.

Burlyuk and Mayakovsky took part in public disputes on art and gave lectures on the new trends; Burlyuk speaking on art and Mayakovsky on poetry; sometimes, however, it would be the other way about.

Out of some twenty essays written at the time by Vladimir Mayakovsky, only a half of it deals with poetry and the art of versification. In the others, as well as in numerous public lectures Mayakovsky puts up a fight for new trends in Russian art against transient foreign influences alien to the bright optimistic spirit of Russian national art.

"It's high time for Russian art to let go the strings held out to it from across our borders," was one of his war cries. In addressing young artists and students he called on them to smash the plaster casts in their schools; to relegate to the lumber room the copies of foreign pictures and . . . "to return to the study of the national art. Life and not pictures is the source of art!" (article entitled *Moscow in Danger of Remaining Without Artists*, 1914).

And the same, he said, holds good with regard to literature. He was all for the new,

the very newest, which emerges "from the native channels of the Russian language, from the old Russian folk song."

His counsel to take folklore as the groundwork for the "construction of the new Russian temple of beauty" is far from being a denial of everything foreign. It were hard to suspect Mayakovsky of a platitude that "all that is not ours is rubbish." It is not that he advocates a return to the past; he urges poets to seek in the rich springs of creative folk art the essence of optimism and faith in man without which art withers and dies. "The picturesque soul of Russia," and the "original Russian folk language" is the key indispensable for tuning the instrument of the new art; the one thing that can foster a joyous, living style in place of the "decadent Munich School".

And it was perhaps in this all-conquering optimism, in the annunciation and glorification of life at a time when death ran amuck in the fields and the face of the earth was wrinkled with trenches that lay the main force of the new movement. By turning towards folk art they discarded not only superficial foreign influences, but also that mysticism and pessimism that was flourishing in the Russian art of that time.

Mayakovsky's appeal for a return to folklore did perhaps sound somewhat strange coming as it did from a poet of the big city, from a convinced and militant fighter for a new, contemporary art. However, he never tired of reiterating the necessity of steadily marching forward in search of new forms, of new expressions reflecting the real life—the on-rushing tide of the new unusual life.

Mayakovsky sensed very acutely the contradiction between the new life currents, the new socialist ideas and the old form, the old conservative canons: the same contradic-



Repin. A drawing by V. Mayakovsky

tion of which Stalin gave a philosophic generalization when he said "it is not between content and form in general that the conflict lies, but between the *old* form and the *new* content which is seeking for new form and is endeavouring to find it."

It will be no exaggeration to say that Mayakovsky's views on art were formed, strengthened and reasoned out on the basis of poetry and painting simultaneously.

After the revolution of 1917 Mayakovsky became a member of the newly organized trade union of painters and was even elected delegate from the Moscow artists to the Union of Art Workers. Later on he worked in the Department of Graphic Arts under the People's Commissariat for Public Education; was editor of a paper—*Art in the Commune*. And last but not least there was ROSTA.

A group of artists and poets who had during the Civil War been working in ROSTA (Russian Telegraphic Agency) issued a series of posters—a medium of political propaganda accompanied with short verses, and called "Satire Windows." In the beginning they came out in a single copy and were posted in the windows of vacant shop premises (hence their strange name). Later, they were stenciled in fifty, hundred and two hundred copies. They were put out at top-speed and often brought the latest news ahead of the dailies.

"As often as not," Mayakovsky would recount in later years, "the telegraphic news of a war victory would be hung out in the streets in a coloured poster in something like forty minutes or an hour. That was the only way to do it—with telegraphic and machine-gun speed!"

For three years Mayakovsky the poet and Mayakovsky the artist, contributed hundreds of posters and thousands of drawings to ROSTA "Satire Windows". It was a close collaboration, so close, indeed, that it is almost impossible now to separate the two. Was it the poet who supplied the rhymes to the drawings or the artist who illustrated the poet's verses?

Ten years later, Mayakovsky, when publishing some of his ROSTA work containing the verses and drawings of the Civil War years, gave the collection the title *Grim Laughter*. It was an apt expression. Laughter, yes... but not merry laughter, not even satirical laughter; it was grim laughter, laughter that rang with menace... It would not have been enough merely to laugh at the enemies who were endeavouring to strangle the young Soviet Republic!

It was satirical laughter combined with the revolutionary appeal that gave "Satire Windows" their specific flavour. It was intrinsically Mayakovsky's own; flesh of the flesh of his social personality and expressive of his ideological purposefulness.

It was strenuous work, done at frenzied speed; devoted work impelled by lofty ideas, with no eye to reputation or glory (all the ROSTA placards were published anonymously). "Into this work," Mayakovsky wrote later, "we not only put all our skill; we revolutionized tastes and raised the quality of placard art—the art of political propaganda. If there is such a thing in drawing as "a revolutionary taste" that thing is the



A drawing by V. Mayakovsky

style of our "Windows" (Preface to the *Grim Laughter* collection).

Looking through the "Satire Windows" today, we see that the placards put out by the professional artists who collaborated with Mayakovsky—Mikhail Cheremnykh for example, or Ivan Malyutin, are more perfect in point of graphic and pictorial craftsmanship than are Mayakovsky's. But they are less in the placard style and more like newspaper or magazine illustrations. Mayakovsky's contributions are remarkable for their expressiveness, laconic style, the absence of details and particulars. They are ideas transformed straight to the drawing, as simple, vivid and significant as the rough-and-ready rhymes accompanying them.

"A record of an eventful three-year period of revolutionary struggle interpreted in splashes of colour and the resonant call of slogans," Mayakovsky would say speaking of his ROSTA works during the Civil War. It was work belonging equally to both the poet and artist in him.

But gradually the artist gave way to the poet.

If there exists such a thing in nature as sublimation of talent, then it is the process we see operating in the art of Mayakovsky.

Caricatures to poetical pamphlets, illustrations to propaganda publications for the peasantry, drawings to numerous poems—he accepts them all—he is not averse, as a painter to work for a poet such as Mayakovsky. But such opportunities grow fewer and fewer. His illustrations to folk poems are graphic, clever and expressive. What other artist could be as daringly simple and laconic?

And fewer, too, become his portraits now sketched in pen-and-ink, now with a match. As time goes on, the thick sheet of drawing-paper rarely comes to his hand.

But for all that, on the poet's writing table which has been preserved untouched as he left it sixteen years ago, we can still see lying side by side with his fountain pen the implements of his second profession—pencils and brushes; and in the depths of one of the drawers are a dozen or so bottles of Indian ink of different colours.

VASSILI KATANYAN

NEWS AND VIEWS

STALIN PRIZES FOR LITERATURE AND ART FOR THE YEAR 1945

Of the one hundred and eighteen people awarded 1945 Stalin prizes for literary and art works fifty-eight received first prizes.

Literature

The motif permeating the prize-winning works is that of Soviet humanism. This can be felt throughout the pages of Alexander Fadeyev's novel *The Young Guard*; of Valentine Kataev's *Son of the Regiment*, of Vera Inber's poem *Pulkovo Meridian*, and her *Leningrad Diary*; of the verses of Yakub Kolas, the Belorussian poet. Writers have drawn inspiration from the new qualities that men and women acquired during the war, the marvellous qualities which made themselves felt in the new and unaccustomed circumstances.



A. Fadeyev

Two of the prize works, *The Young Guard*¹ and *Son of the Regiment*² our readers are already familiar with; Fadeyev's novel was well received by the critics. The poet Pavel Antokolsky told on the pages of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* of his meeting with one of the heroes of the narrative, a member of the Krasnodon underground organization. "This young man," he writes, "was fortunate enough to remain alive, and was not captured by the Germans. Later he fought in the ranks of the Red Army and up to a year ago had not been demobbed. The first parts of the then unfinished novel greatly interested him. He eagerly studied its pages, and saw in it his own recent past. What struck him particularly was how the writer knew all the details about himself and his friends who were no longer among the living."

Antokolsky dwells at some length on one of the characteristic traits of Fadeyev's book—although, he says, most of the heroes perish and evoke your sympathies, death is not the dominant chord in the story, which is permeated with a deep assertion of Life and its ultimate triumph.

"That is why it seems to me," he goes on to say, "the action of the novel develops at a quickened pace as it nears the end. It is all pre-determined. The last pages do not seem to succeed one another—they all seem to come with a rush. There is no room for details here. This is how the fifth acts in the tragedies of Shakespeare or the Spanish writers end. The battered and bleeding bodies of the heroes are sent flying into the battered pitshafts. The author has dwelt briefly on this horror but the little there is—sparing and grim, is like a record of the destruction of the world. In this lies the art of writing.

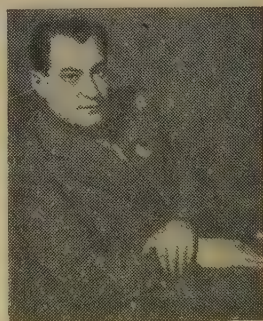
"This power of saying much in few words was prompted not by artistic intuition, but the instinct of a man of action. It does not do, nay, it is sinful to dwell on death. That the ancient Greeks knew."

Here is what Nikolai Tikhonov says in speaking of the heroes of *The Young Guard*.

"You have faith in this heroic youth, because those you see before you are not images of martyred saints with haloes round their heads, but simple people whose lives you have been following up as you would the lives of your friends in all the details of everyday life. You have seen them living, suffering, fighting, loving and dying."

In commenting on the award of a prize to Kataev, for his *Son of the Regiment*, the critics note that the author has successfully evaded two dangerous pitfalls confronting a writer of stories for children. In his narrative you will find neither the cloying sentimentality nor the moralizing tone that Alexandra Brustein, the writer of plays for the young says makes some authors sweeten their true feelings with generous doses of saccharine.

Nava'i by Aibek, an Uzbek writer, is another Stalin Prize winner, whose author has acquired fame for his poetry as well as for his prose. A member of



V. Kataev

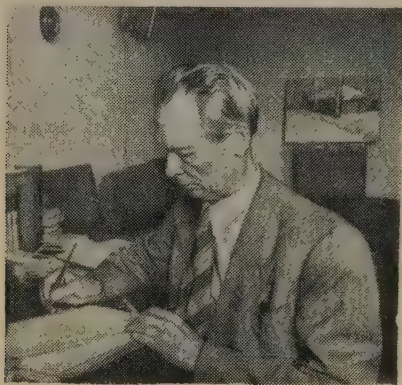


Aibek

¹ See *International Literature* No. 7, 1945 and *Soviet Literature* Nos. 1, 3, 4-5, 1946.

² See *International Literature* No. 11, 1945.

the Uzbek Academy of Sciences, the writer has devoted years to the study of facts and documents bearing on the life and activities of the famous Uzbek poet, philosopher and statesman of the 15th century, Ali Sher Nava'i. The narrative shows the life of the people in medieval Uzbekistan—the action carrying us to a thronged caravansarai, to magnificent palaces, to a battlefield, and to a



A. Upits

modes cell in a monastery where disputes on philosophic questions run high.¹

The Green Earth is the title of a novel by Andrei Upits, a venerable Latvian writer,



A. Isaakian

describing life in a Latvian village in the latter half of the last century. The central figures of the narrative are Vanags, a wealthy farmer, who has fattened on the sweat of his tenants, the poor peasant Osis and his family. Upits tears the veil from the legend of the idyllic relations between the labourers and the masters of the soil in Latvia.

First prizes for poetry are awarded to the Armenian poet, Avetik Isaakian, and the Belorussian poet, Yakub Kolas.

Isaakian, one of the fathers of modern Armenian poetry, began writing as far back as the nineties of last century. His verses have been translated by such eminent Russian poets as

Blok and Bryusov. In 1911 he was exiled by the tsarist government and returned to his native country only after a sojourn of twenty-five years abroad. In the years of the war against fascism the poet in his *War Cry* and other poems called Soviet people to a life-and-death struggle with the enemy.

Many of his verses have entered into Armenian folklore and are sung by the *ashugs* or native bards. Some eighty pieces of his poetry have been set to music.

If Isaakian is honoured as the oldest representative of the literature of Armenia, the same place is held in the literature of Belorussia by Yakub Kolas, whose fortieth anniversary as writer is to be celebrated this autumn. His is a versatile art: lyrics, epic poetry, satirical verses,



M. Bazhan



V. Inber



V. Solovyov

books for children, and a number of tales came from his ready pen. The verses Kolas wrote during the war have found particular favour with the public. When Belorussia, the first Soviet republic to suffer the onslaught of the enemy fell victim to Hitlerite aggression, Kolas, who found himself far from home, makes songs about his native land and the unswerving courage of its people. He dedicates some delightful verses to Uzbekistan, too, where he lived for the time that his own land of Belorussia was under the iron heel of the invader.

Second prize for poetry was awarded to the Ukrainian poet, Mikola Bazhan, for the historical poem *Daniilo Galitski* and a cycle of verses on Stalingrad, and another to Vera Inber, the poetess.

Bazhan's poem records the battle fought against the German knights in Volhynia and their final overthrow.

Vera Inber spent all the months of the siege in Leningrad and it is not to be wondered at that her *Pulkovo Meridian*—a poetical record of that time of untold hardship and supreme

¹ For a review of the book see p. 60 of this issue.

heroism should have acquired the popularity it has. When the work was published the author received numbers of letters from front-liners and youth, and from men and women who had lost their near and dear ones during that terrible time.

For Those at Sea, a play from the life of Soviet seamen by Boris Lavrenev, and *The Great Tsar*, a historical play about Ivan Grozny by Vladimir Solovyev have gained first prizes in the drama division.



B. Lavrenev

Music

The list of composers who have been awarded Stalin prizes is headed by the name of Sergei Prokofyev who received a First Prize for the ballet *Cinderella*. The venerable composer, Nikolai Myaskovsky, earned his third Stalin Prize with a Concerto for 'Cello and Orchestra. The musical achievements of the national republics have found recognition in prizes awarded to Eugene Kapp, the Estonian composer, for his opera *The Fire of Vengeance* and to two young Azerbaijani composers (one of them a fourth-year student of the Moscow Conservatory), Kara Kareyev, and Ahmet Ghazhiev for the opera *Vatan* (The Native Land). *The Fire of Vengeance* presents the heroic rising of the Estonian peasantry against the Germans and has scored successes with Estonian audiences. *Vatan* depicts the struggle waged against the fascist invaders by the people of Azerbaijan on the front of battle and on the home front.

Of the other musical works that have gained prizes we must mention the *Second Quartette for Strings* by Dmitri Kabalevsky; Vano Muradelli's *Second Symphony*; a *Serenade for String Orchestra* by Lev Knipper and *Ukrainian Quintette* by Boris Latoshinski. In this year's list of laureates is included the name of Gnesin—one of the oldest Moscow composers, once a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, who received a prize for his *Sonata-Fantasia for Pianoforte and Strings*, and the young Leningrad composer, Sviridov, author of a *Trio for Pianoforte, Violin and 'Cello*.

The song was a faithful companion to the man at the front. *The One I Love*, *In the Forest Near the Front-Line* and other heartfelt and tuneful melodies were composed by Matvei Blanter who is also among the 1945 prize winners.

Another name on the list is that of the late Professor Alexandrov, composer and director of the Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble renowned both at home and beyond the borders of his native land, who has been posthumously awarded a prize for his work in organizing and directing his famous concerts. The list further includes Sveshnikov, conductor of the Russian Song Chorus; Igumnov, the

outstanding pianist and teacher; Elfrida Pakul, the talented Lithuanian singer, and Chernetsky, conductor of one of the best brass bands in the U.S.S.R.

Cinema

In the division of cinematography are seven films: three full length artistic features and four documental. Among the winners of Stalin first prizes for artistic films is *The Great Turning Point*, a war story (producer, Friedrich Ermler; author of scenario, Boris Chirskov; cameraman, Abraham Kaltsaty; artist Nikolai Suvorov and Mikhail Derzhavin and Alexander Zrazhevsky in the principal roles).

The film *Guilty Though Guiltless*, is a screen version of the well-known drama of that name by the great Russian playwright, Ostrovsky. The producer, Vladimir Petrov, actress Alla Tarasova, cameraman Vladimir Yakovlev and artist Vladimir Egorov have been awarded Stalin second prizes in recognition of this admirable production.

The film *Arshin-Mal-Alan* has earned a similar award for the Azerbaijani cinema workers.

The documentary films, with only one exception, are naturally devoted to the culminating operations of the war. *Berlin*; *The Liberation of Czechoslovakia* and the *Rout of Japan*—the names speak for themselves. These films meant hard work for their producers, Raisman, Svilova, Kopalin, Zarkhi, Kheifetz and Setkina-Nesterova. The parties of cameramen underwent the greatest danger and hardship to do their jobs well. Two of them died the death of heroes: Semyon Stoyanovsky at the capture of Vienna, and Boris Pumpiansky, while making shots from the air in the Carpathians.

A prize was also awarded to a team of cameramen for shooting the big full length documentary colour film *Physical Culture Parade in the Year 1945*.

Painting and sculpture

A Stalin first prize was awarded for a portrait of Joseph Stalin by the Armenian painter, Dmitri Nalbandian. The portrait of the leader of the Soviet State in his study is an excellent likeness and shows mastery of execution.

Attention was attracted at the All-Union Exhibition by two pictures by Arkadi Plastov: *Haymaking* and *The Harvest*, and a painting by Fyodor Bogorodsky, *Glory to the*



Bust of the poet Chakhrukhadze by the sculptor Nikoladze

Fallen, which have been awarded prizes. The list of winners is rounded off by the name of the portrait painter Georgi Vereisky.

In the field of sculpture, prizes were awarded for a bust of Academician Krylov (theoretician of shipbuilding) by Vera Mukhina, well known abroad for her sculptural decorations of the Soviet pavilion at the Paris World Exhibition, and a bust of the ancient Georgian poet, Chakhrukhadze, by the Georgian sculptor Yakov Nikoladze, who at one time worked under Rodin. A Stalin second prize is awarded to Vuchetich for a bust of General Chernyakhovsky who was killed at the front shortly before victory.

In the architecture division, Stalin second prizes have been awarded to Shchusev, Gorbachev, Yakovlev, Maisel, and Fedotov for the architectural redesigning of the interior of the Lenin Mausoleum.

Theatre

Among the theatrical companies which have carried off prizes we have one of the oldest Russian playhouses—the Moscow Art Theatre, and the young Ermolova Dramatic

Theatre. In the former, the recipients are regisseur Gorchakov, and the actors Bolduman, Bogolyubov, Gribov, and Gotovtsev, for their production of *An Officer of the Fleet*, and in the latter, regisseur Lobanov, actors Ordanskaya and Yakut, and the author of the play, Leonid Malyugin, for the performance of *Old Friends*.

Among the prize winners are also two of our national theatres. The Georgian Rust'veli Theatre received a first prize for *The Great Tsar*, for which Vladimir Solovyev, the author of the play, received a prize in the Literature Division. Khorava, Vasadze and Davitashvili found ways of expressing the intricate characters of the Russian historical figures Ivan Grozny, Vassili Shuisky and Boris Godunov.

A vivid and colourful pageant founded on the motifs of Jewish folklore is unfolded by the State Jewish Theatre in *Freilechs*. Credit for an excellent performance is due to Solomon Mikhoels, the producer, Benjamin Zuskin, one of the actors, and the artist Alexander Tyshler whose achievements have been rewarded with Stalin second prizes.

In the Opera Division, a number of artists of the Leningrad Theatre of Opera and Ballet have received awards for the performance of *The Maid of Orleans* (music by Chaikovsky); the troupe of the Sverdlovsk Theatre of Opera and Ballet have been similarly honoured for a performance of Verdi's *Othello*, and that of the Yerevan Opera House for *Arshak the Second*.

A first prize in the Ballet Division has been carried off for *Cinderella* at the Moscow Bolshoi, by balletmeister Zakharov, Fayer, the conductor; Williams, artist; ballerinas Ulanova and Lepeshinskaya; solo dancers, Gabovich, and Preobrazhensky, and Merited Artist of the Republic, Victorina Krieger.

People's Artist of R.S.F.S.R., Agrippina Vaganova and Leonid Lavrovsky have been awarded a first and second prize respectively for outstanding achievement in choreographic art. Among the many excellent ballet dancers trained by Vaganova are ballerinas Ulanova and Semyonova. Lavrovsky has for some years past been director of the Bolshoi Theatre Ballet.

LITERATURE

WHAT GORKY HAS LEFT US

The Maxim Gorky Museum is housed in one of the old private mansions in Moscow, built by Domenico Giliardi in the twenties of the last century. It is visited daily by hundreds of workers, students, military men and schoolchildren. The department that arouses the greatest interest in the scholars, litterateurs and critics who are making a special study of Gorky's writings is that containing the archives. The manuscripts of Gorky's works, his diaries, notes, letters, in a word, everything that ever came from his pen is preserved in this repository.

The rooms containing the archives are divided off from the rest of the museum by heavy iron doors. The papers are ranged in two rooms lined with ferro-concrete where

An Officer of the Fleet,
staged by Art Theatre



they are preserved in solid cases lying along the walls on iron shelves.

We were told by Elena Rosmirovich, keeper of the archives, that the documents in the safes number some eighty thousand. The most valuable of these are the Gorky M.S.S., of which there are about two thousand four hundred. The M.S.S. of the novel *Life of Klim Samguin*, with its variations run into something like 5,500 pages. Of the play *Summer Residents* as many as four variations are preserved here.

The original manuscripts are not given out to anybody. People studying Gorky's writings receive the required material re-typed or in photo-copies. There are photo-reproductions available of every single page preserved in the archives, Gorky's characteristic handwriting, even, and somewhat angular shows up distinctly in the thousands of copied pages.

There are eight thousand letters written by Gorky and some forty thousand addressed to him. Among his correspondents are men and women of all ages and professions, aged people and children, workers, scholars, writers, peasants and soldiers; they all came to him with their thoughts and plans, turning to him for advice and with requests of every kind. Gorky wrote to and received letters from Henri Barbusse, Bernard Shaw, Stephan Zweig, Upton Sinclair. He carried on an extensive correspondence with Romain Rolland; the two men were not only brothers of the pen, they were united by close ties of friendship. Fifty-nine letters from Gorky to Rolland, and one hundred and twenty of the latter to Gorky make up the sum total of their written intercourse. Gorky's correspondence with Chekhov and Vladimir Korolenko is being prepared for publication. His correspondence with Fyodor Chaliapin ranges over a long period—from the year 1900 almost up to the death of Gorky. In 1916, during a stay in the Crimea, Chaliapin, in Gorky's presence, dictated his autobiography to a stenographer. Gorky edited the narrative, and later wrote it out himself adding some pages to the story of his friend's life. This material has also been prepared for the press.

In the collection there are reminiscences of some three hundred different people who met

Gorky at one time or another. These records are of outstanding interest to the writer's biographers and have not yet been published. The archives are continually being enlarged. The M.S.S. and letters form the subject of systematic research work which promises to give us a more detailed picture of the great master.

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF ALEXANDER BLOK

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Blok, an outstanding Russian poet, numerous articles on his poetry appeared in the press, and his verses were recited over the radio and sung at concerts.

A Blok exhibition is now open at the Academy of Sciences Institute of Literature in Leningrad. Numerous M.S.S. and letters belonging to the poet are on show. His personal records, carefully preserved by his widow up to her death in 1939, have been included in the exhibition. There are books from the poet's own library containing the works of classical and modern writers bearing Blok's notes and commentaries in the margins. Among the presentation books is Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Cloud in Trousers* with an inscription by the author.

Visitors are always interested in the personal belongings of the poet—the bookcase and writing table from his study; the blotter containing some rough notes—the last things he wrote before his death, the sofa on which he died. The calendar shows a yellowed leaflet bearing the date of Sunday, August 7, 1921—the day of Blok's death.

An exhibition of Blok's books has been organized by the Lenin State Library in Moscow, among them complete collections of his works, separate editions of some of his poems, and the first publications in contemporary periodicals of his earliest efforts. There are, besides, some translations of Blok's poems into foreign languages.

The *Literaturnaya Gazeta* carries an article by Ivan Sergievsky, an authority on literary matters, entitled *Alexander Blok As Critic*,

telling of his works of literary criticism and his essays on topical questions in literature and drama.

The latest volume of *Literaturnoye Naslyedstvo* published by the Academy of Sciences Institute of Literature is dedicated to Alexander Blok. The book contains articles and essays on the poet's writings, some of which relate how he worked on his various poems. The reminiscences of the actress Olga Gzovskaya, who met the poet in connection with the contemplated Art Theatre production of his drama *The Rose and the Cross*, will be read with great interest. The volume contains some of Blok's letters, now published for the first time. Many contain his thoughts on literature. "I notice that I keep quoting Shakespeare," Blok writes to one of his friends. "I have a profound affection for him."

A collection of reminiscences centring round the figure of Alexander Blok has been issued by the *State Literary Publishing House*. Some are contributions of the poet's relatives and nearest friends. Many pages are devoted to Blok's childhood and student years. Reading the reminiscences of Boris Sadovsky, Victor Strazhev and Yuri Verkhovsky we acquaint ourselves with Blok's literary interests, his creative methods and some interesting facts and incidents connected with his private life.

The latest volume in the *Literary Portraits* series published by the State Literary Museum in Moscow is Victor Strazhev's book entitled *Alexander Blok*.

A complete two-volume collection of Alexander Blok's poems is shortly to appear in a *Soviet Writer* edition.

The *State Musical Publishing House* has issued a collection of twenty-nine songs written by Soviet composers to words by Alexander Blok.

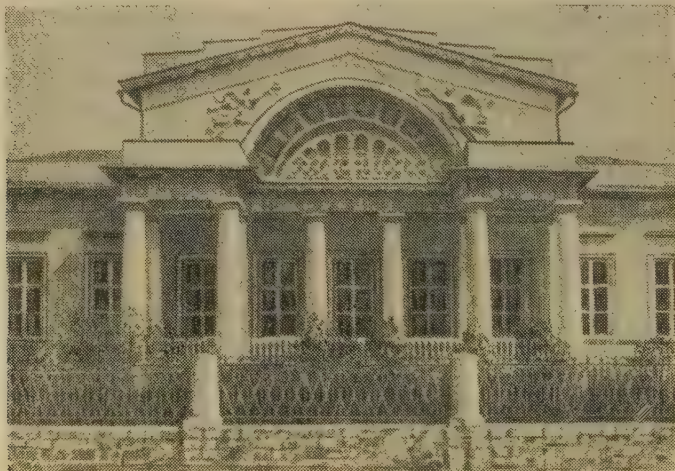
THE ALL-UNION CHAMBER OF BOOKS

It is the rule for every publishing house and printing office throughout the Soviet Union to send forty-six copies of each of its publications to the All-Union Chamber of Books in Moscow. This is done with a view to preserving a number of copies of every printed work for all time and supplying books and periodicals to the most important libraries in the country.

During the twenty-five years of its existence, one hundred million books, magazines, newspapers, maps, musical productions, and pamphlets have been distributed in this way among Soviet libraries. During the war some two million books and ten million newspapers were received by different libraries through this agency. A total amount of not less than six hundred kilogrammes (about 13 cwts.) of packages, are received daily, hundreds of parcels and wrappers go out directed to places big and small throughout the ends of the land. Every single publication received at the Chamber is carefully filed and given bibliographical treatment, there being a whole system of catalogues facilitating the classification of all new publications.

Before the war, the All-Union Chamber of Books was housed in one of the most handsome buildings in Moscow, a house, originally belonging to the Prince Gagarin and erected in 1816 to 1818 by the famous architect Mikhail Beauvais, who designed the finest specimens of the so-called "Moscow Empire" style of the early 19th century. The house Beauvais built for Prince Gagarin was designed in the form of a semi-circle in the centre of which was a white colonnade of the façade, ornamented with bas-relief and portico. Inside the building, the moulded ornaments and old-fashioned lustres of the beginning of last century had been preserved intact.

On July 23, 1941, the house of the All-Union Chamber of Books was almost completely wrecked by a German bomb, the flames



The Book Room House in Moscow

which enveloped the building destroying the fruits of many years' labours of Soviet librarians. The systematized catalogue containing four million items perished in the flames, many of the others being seriously damaged. It was a fortunate thing that the general alphabetical catalogue was preserved which is the nucleus of further registration and filing.

One of the big problems now facing Moscow architects is that of reconstructing this unique building; of restoring the form and aspect it wore one hundred and thirty years ago. A hundred and fifty or so designs of the charming old mansion have been preserved in the Moscow Museum of Architecture, to say nothing of numerous photographs of separate rooms and portions of the mouldings of the wood-carving and lustres. By the side of the reconstructed house is to be built another, a many-storied building of ferro-concrete with underground tunnels and pneumatic communications which is also to accommodate departments of the All-Union Chamber of Books. The old building will house the "brain" of the institution—its scientific research departments, bibliographical library, a permanent exhibition of Soviet publications, the studies of research workers and the conference hall. The new building will contain the offices of "Annals", the Reading Room, the department containing the "one copy of each publication appearing in the Soviet Union" and special repositories for books, newspapers, periodicals, pictorial publications, geographical maps and music.

RUSSIAN LITERATURE MUSEUM

A Museum of Russian Literature is being organized in Moscow, where the history of Russia's literature from its earliest beginnings to our own days will be illustrated.

The department dealing with 18th century literature is already open. The main phases in the development of Russian letters of that period are revealed in something like fifteen hundred exhibits—collections of first editions of rare 18th-century books; of genuine old engravings, valuable folklore material and Russian popular—*loubok*—prints.

The exhibition opens with literature of Tsar Peter the Great's time; books in manuscript; the first books printed in the civic type introduced under an Ukase of Peter in the year 1708; etchings of "battles of war" as they were then called, executed by personal order of the Tsar. . . Hall No. 2 is devoted to the literary activities of Mikhail Lomonosov, the illustrious Russian peasant-scholar. The next halls show material bearing on the works of Alexander Sumarokov, the first Russian playwright, of Gavriil Derzhavin, a poet of the times of Catherine II; of Nikolai Novikov, humanist and prominent figure in public enlightenment; Denis Fonvizin, the father of the Russian satirical comedy, and of Ivan Krylov, the writer of fables. . . .

HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN BOOK

Interesting work in the study of the history of book printing in Russia is at the present time being conducted at the Institute of

Book Printing and Publishing Technique in Moscow. The art of printing in Russia has travelled paths all its own. Certain Ukases of Tsar Ivan Grozny (1530-84) have been found wherein the name is mentioned of Marusha Nefed'yev, who was a close associate of Ivan Fedorov, the father of Russian printing. It was formerly believed that the civic type introduced by Peter the Great in 1708, was manufactured after the Dutch patterns, whereas it has now been ascertained that this type was entirely the work of the hands of Russian craftsmen.

THE ARTIST AND THE BOOK

What a canvas is to the painter, a page of a book is to the artist who works at the design and illustration of the volume.

One of the oldest Soviet artists in this field is Nikolai Ilyin. His contribution to works of Russian and world literature is no small one—some two and a half thousand covers and hundreds of illustrations! He made the designs for the *Academia* editions of Alexander Pushkin and Nikolai Gogol and of the contemporary Soviet writers and poets, Vyacheslav Shishkov, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Sergei Esenin, Pavel Antokolsky, Constantine Simonov, Lev Kassil and others. It is the clever brush and pencil of Nikolai Ilyin, too, that have worked at such big editions as the *Large Soviet Atlas of the World*; *The History of the Civil War in U.S.S.R.*, and the *Pocket Atlas of the U.S.S.R.*

Lev Kassil's book *Shvambrania*, designed and illustrated by Nikolai Ilyin, was awarded a prize at the Paris World Exhibition in 1937. To create a new style for title-type the artist had to make long and searching studies of Russian letter styles beginning with the 10th century.

A connoisseur of popular ornament Ilyin likes to make use of it in his designs. He has made over two hundred vignettes and tail-pieces, in the styles of the national arts of the peoples of the U.S.S.R.

His latest effort is a series containing 152 pieces of miniature silhouette illustrations (etched on wood), to the lyrical poems of Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov. The artist is now busy on a large size calendar for collective farmers for the year 1947, abundantly illustrated by reproductions of the best Russian masters.

CHRONICLE OF LITERARY LIFE

At the *State Literary Publishing House*, the publication of the complete works of Alexei Tolstoy in fifteen volumes is under way.

The first number of a new literature and art journal *Dalny Vostok* (Far East) has appeared at Khabarovsk.

Valentine Katayev's *Son of the Regiment* has appeared in the New Juvenile Literature Series. Forthcoming publications in the same edition are the memoirs of partisan Sidor Kovpak, *From Putivel to the Carpathians* and Mikhail Prishvin's *The Storehouse of the Sun*.

On the occasion of her seventieth birthday, Marpha Kryukova, the famous teller of na-

tional stories and ballads was awarded the Order of Lenin. A stream of letters and telegrams of congratulations from all parts of the Soviet Union was addressed to the recipient of the decoration at her native northern seacoast village of Zimnyaya Zolotitsa.

The poet Pavel Antokolsky was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday. He has further been honoured with a Stalin Prize for his poem entitled *The Son*, dedicated to the memory of his own son killed in the war.¹

A GLIMPSE INTO OLD MOSCOW LITERARY LIFE

Among the personages of Alexander Ostrovsky's *Lucrative Place* is a tea-house waiter, called Vassili, who is a lover of literature with a good knowledge of books. The character is taken from real life, an attendant of this type really having been employed in the popular "Pechkin's Coffee-House" in Moscow.

This establishment arose in the thirties of last century and was situated in Theatre Square, in the centre of the city. On the tables of the five rooms of the coffee-house lay fresh newspapers and journals of those days—*Severnaya Pchela* (The Northern Bee), *Biblioteka dlya Chtenya* (Readers' Library) and *Otechestvennyye Zapiski* (Homeland Notes).

"This is one of the cleverest and wittiest meeting places in Moscow," the writer Alexei Pisensky said once, speaking of this meeting ground of Moscow writers, actors and scientists. If you drop in of a morning, you might meet here the famous tragedian Pavel Mochalov, while later in the day you might possibly even meet the famous actors Mikhail Shchepkin and Vassili Zhivokini having their after-dinner coffee; here, too, towards evening the professors of the Moscow University like to spend a quiet evening chatting after a hard day's work. In their time, critics and publicists like Visarion Belinsky, Alexander Herzen and Timofei Granovsky were frequent visitors here.

And late in the evening when the performance was over, the actors of the Maly Theatre would come here to relax in its hospitable walls. Puns and witticisms were exchanged. Plumb centre of the stage was Dmitri Lensky, the well-known writer of vaudevilles. He would be comfortably sitting there at Pechkin's from morning till late into the night.

In the hot summer weather, one of the frequenters of the coffee-house, Nikolai Ketcher, a friend of Herzen, and a translator of Shakespeare, invariably ordered an ice cream and a portion of ham. At the astonishment on people's faces when they saw this strange combination, Herzen once said with a laugh:

"What is it you, gentlemen, are laughing at? Don't you see that Ketcher is a good manager? First he fills his cellar with ice, then he puts in the victuals."

¹ For an excerpt from the poem see p.17 of this issue.

Another welcome visitor was the young actor, Prov Sadovsky, the founder of the theatrical dynasty of the Sadovskys, whose descendants are still acting at that famous old playhouse.

Vivid descriptions of scenes from the Pechkin coffee-house presented by the hand of a master are to be found in several of the stories of the famous 19th-century writer, Ivan Gorbunov.

ARTS

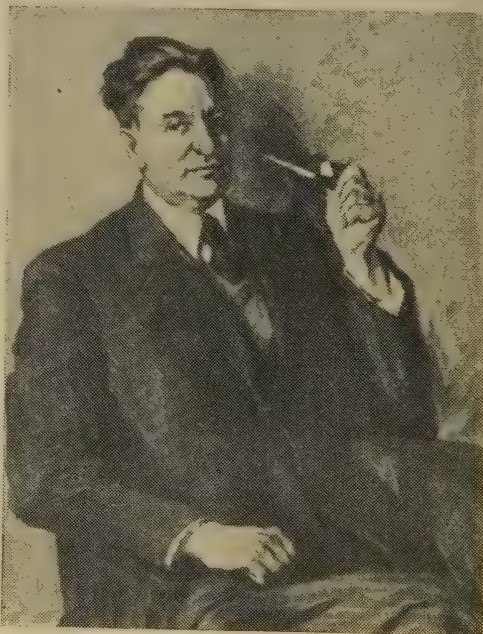
THE PORTRAITS BY NADEZHDA PESHKOVA

The history of painting knows the names of many talented women portrait-painters. Suffice it to mention Artemisia Gentileschi, Elisabeta Sirani of the 17th century, Rosalba Carriera, before whom Watteau bowed the knee, and the famous French women, Vigée Lebrun and Labille-Guyard, or the Swiss painter, Angelica Kaufmann (18th century).

Among modern Soviet painters, Nadezhda Peshkova, the widow of Maxim Peshkov, Gorky's son, devotes herself entirely to the painting of portraits. At the exhibition arranged by the Union of Moscow Painters her pictures were first seen by the public.

She is a pupil of Pavel Korin, one of the outstanding masters of our time. The fifteen or so portraits exhibited display able composition and aptly depicted resemblance to the sitter.

The painter prefers dark tones—with a tendency towards monochrome. In her later pictures, however, there is greater variety. Lyudmila Tolstaya, for example, the wife of the late Alexei Tolstoy, is presented in light tones—wearing a white blouse with wide softly-falling sleeves.



A. Tikhonov. Portrait by N. Peshkova

A number of the pictures are portraits of Gorky's intimates and friends. They include Ekaterina Peshkova, the wife of the great writer, in a black velvet dress, Maria F. Andreeva, formerly an actress of the Art Theatre, now the Manager of the Moscow House of Scientists, the well-known Soviet writers, Vsevolod Ivanov and Alexander Tikhonov, the talented actress Ranevskaya, and others.

It is a successful debut and has evoked considerable interest in Moscow art circles.

A SHORT REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS 1945-46

The past season was an extremely eventful one in the world of art. The All-Union Exhibition of Paintings, Sculptures and Graphic Art (see No. 7 of *Soviet Literature*, 1946), the exhibition of popular decorative and applied arts, the exhibition of works of war artists of the Grekov Studio, an exhibition of Soviet polygraphy, some forty personal expositions of such leading artists and sculptors as Sergei Gerasimov, Yuri Pimenov, Vladimir Favorsky, Evgeni Kibrik, Nikolai Tyrsa, Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva, Ivan Efimov and others—this is only a short list of exhibitions alone. If we also recall that during the past months some of the largest art repositories of the U.S.S.R. were reopened after re-evacuation and restoration, such as the Tretyakov Gallery and Museum of Oriental Culture in Moscow, the Hermitage and Russian Museum in Leningrad, many museums in cities throughout the various republics of the U.S.S.R., and still add the fact that the publication of the central art journals *Iskustvo* (Art) and *Tvorchestvo* (Creation) was resumed, we gain a clear picture of the busy and intense life of the Soviet world of art in the first post-war year.

The Moscow exhibition of Handicraft and Folk Art charmed all visitors by its brightness, range, variety and depth of expression. Here we found everything—from filmy lace with fairy-like patterns woven into it, resembling the magic designs drawn by the frost on our windowpanes, to the vivid red-black-gold paintings on wooden pottery. The naive appeal of a clay toy from Vyatka merges with the oriental wisdom of carpets from Central Asia, the fine workmanship of bone carvings; the delightful phantasy of ceramics lives side by side with the delicate miniature lacquer paintings and the specific plasticity of popular wooden carvings. The exhibits of this exposition reveal all the wonderful features of the art of the people: the organic nature of this creative work, the wealth of imagination, fine sense of the material worked on and its inherent properties.

Sergei Gerasimov ranks amongst the leading Soviet painters. The exhibition of his works arranged in honour of his 60th birthday showed the wide range of ideas, subjects and formal problems on which the artist has been working for 40 years. The Russian peasantry and Russian landscapes form the

leading themes in his works. It is true that the visitor to the exhibition is also struck by the warm splendour of a Central Asian summer and the stern loveliness of the Caucasian autumn. But nevertheless, the exoticism of the Orient never takes the upper hand in the artist's imagination fixed upon central and northern Russia, its people, its landscapes and its past.

Incidentally, the specific nature of this painter's works, is not only determined by his individual talent but also, to a great extent, by the world outlook of his countrymen. The love of sunshine and light, the joie-de-vivre which permeate Gerasimov's landscapes and many of his topical compositions are dictated to the artist by the world outlook of the Soviet citizen. Gerasimov has travelled a long and difficult road in his work on the Russian village. The spiritual strength of the Russian peasant was first expressed in his famous picture *The Collective Farm Watchman* (1934). And the artistic seekings of all the pre-war years were summed up in a large canvas *A Collective Farm Holiday* (1936).

In his works of the epoch of the Great Patriotic War, the strength and daring of the images is combined with masterful colour solutions. The best picture of this period is *The Partisan's Mother* (1943). The subject is not complicated: an elderly peasant woman, the mother of a partisan, defies the death that is awaiting her and, refusing to betray her son, throws words of burning hatred at the Hitlerite facing her. The heroic grandeur of the peasant woman, expressed without any affectation, the nobility of her sufferings are conceived as the symbol of the spiritual victory of the Soviet citizen.

Gerasimov's landscape painting is divided into two stages. Whereas in the twenties and beginning of the thirties the painter was drawn by the charming simplicity of the plains around Moscow, later major forceful notes appeared in such paintings as *At the White Sea* (1933), *The End of Summer and Winter* (1939), *Birch Trees* (1945), and also the series of Caucasian (1937-38), and Central Asian landscapes (1942), while the entire composition of the paintings acquired a new ardour.

The ten-years' work (1935-45) of the Soviet illustrator Evgeni Kibrik found manifold reflection at the exhibition of his drawings organized by the Moscow Union of Soviet Artists. The chief stages in Kibrik's career are connected with four masterpieces of world literature: *Colas Breugnon* and *L'Ame Enchantée* by Romain Rolland, *Thyl Ulenspiegel* by Charles de Coster, and *Taras Bulba* by Nikolai Gogol. The lithographs for these books formed the basic materials of the exhibition.

Kibrik has elaborated his own method of working on illustrations. Far from the *chrestomathic* interpretations of classic literature, the artist conveys in his drawings the understanding of the literature of the past by a man of our days. Colas Breugnon, Thyl Ulenspiegel, Taras Bulba look at us from the pages of the illustrations in the true fullness of their characters.



Taras Bulba. An engraving by Kibrik

The cycle of illustrations for *Colas Breugnon* is the artist's first big work that brought him general recognition. Kibrik has succeeded in creating wonderfully expressive portraits of the heroes of this novel, Colas, the carpenter from Clamcy, and the beloved of his youth Lasochka.

In 1936 Romain Rolland wrote to Kibrik in the name of Colas Breugnon: "This is the creation of a strong and original artist who leaves his mark on everything that he sees. He has done well and I congratulate him."

The *Ulenspiegel* cycle evidences the artist's maturity. Both his style of drawing and mastery of revealing psychology have formed themselves. Kibrik no longer limits himself to a portrayal of his personages, he depicts their characters and the development of the latter.

Of the series of illustrations to Romain Rolland's *L'Ame Enchantée* Kibrik succeeded in finishing only a few sketches before the war broke out, but these rank amongst his best works. Such are the pictures of Paris life at the beginning of the 20th century, the "portraits" of Annette Rivière and Marc.

In illustrating the books of Western writers, Kibrik always remains a Russian artist in the essence of his creative work. The master was not so much drawn by the national colouring of the works of Romain Rolland and de Coster as by their popular nature and epic scope.

The great events of the Patriotic War strengthened the artist's love for all things heroic. The selection of Gogol's *Taras Bulba* for a new cycle of illustrations was inspired by the war. Of the 55 illustrations of this cycle particularly noteworthy is the mass scene: *The Road to Execution*. With measured but firm steps the Cossacks march to their death. The group is monolithic, almost sculptural in its entirety.

The works of Georgi Vereisky are displayed in one of the Leningrad exhibition halls. Vereisky is known in the world of art chiefly for his graphic portraits. In this comparatively rare genre the artist has

been working since 1922 when he first exhibited a cycle of autolithographs *Portraits of Russian Artists*. Very rarely, Vereisky sketches landscapes.

A pupil of the younger generation of the masters of the "World of Art" Group—Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva and Evgeni Lanseret—Vereisky has inherited the best traditions of Russian graphics of the beginning of the 20th century: laconic strokes, a fine sense of line, an organic integrity of composition. But amongst the "World of Art" group, Vereisky always stood out by his striving for realistic objectiveness of his images, a feature displayed in his series of portraits of Soviet cultural workers. All twelve lithographs of this series are dedicated to outstanding figures in the Soviet world of art and science. The lithographs are marked not only by their faultless resemblance to the original: they present, as it were, graphic tales, as for instance, the portrait of the famous sculptor Vera Mukhina. The artist is shown in her studio, working on the design of a monument. Vereisky has brought out with strength of delicate perception the contrast between the energetic courageous face of the sculptress and her slim, nervous hands. Next to the artist lies a lump of clay, the soulless matter that will spring to life as soon as it is touched by the hand of the sculptor. Finished works stand in the background.

Vereisky has excellent ability of revealing the character of his sitter through some small, unimportant external detail. The stubborn chin of Sergei Gerasimov, the energetic pose of Boris Johanson, the tired eyes of Sarra Lebedeva—all these are keys to the interpretation of the character. The seemingly accidental posture, a fleeting expression instantly recorded, and what sometimes appears to be incompleteness of execution (in the portraits of E. Lanseret and S. Merkulov) are all only excellently elaborated mediums through which the true meaning of the portrait is conveyed.

Georgi Vereisky enjoys mastery over all the means of graphic portrayal—from severe "academic" lines to impressionist strokes hinting a mere suggestion.

IN MOSCOW

Veteran theatre-goers affirm that as soon as the thermometer rises to 20° C in the shade, the box-office receipts of theatres and concert halls begin to drop sharply. And indeed, it has always been a rule that urban life dies down in the summer and a "general pause" takes place in art. The last season in Moscow was an exception to this rule. Although many of the capital's largest theatres were closed down for the summer vacation, and the symphony season was long over, theatrical first-nights followed one after the other far into July, while new programs were presented every evening in the Chaikovsky Concert Hall.

In a short period of time, the Moscow Art Theatre has staged the late Alexei Tolstoy's play *Ivan Grozny*; to mark the Gorky jubilee, the Maly Theatre presented his play *The Philistines*, and the Kamerny Theatre the drama *The Old Man*; the Ermolova Theatre successfully presented the first staging of *Far From Stalingrad* by the young playwright Surov.

The Philistines was Gorky's first dramatic work, written for the young Art Theatre in 1902. Already before being staged, the play won immense popularity throughout Russia: 12 editions, totalling 60,000 copies, were sold out in the course of a year. The stage career of *The Philistines* was somewhat different. The play was first presented in Petersburg and then, on October 25, 1902, it opened in Moscow. The democratically-minded public awaited this first-night as an outstanding event, the police prepared for it with some anxiety. But the play was given a cold reception and ran only 23 days. The family drama of the Besemenovs was talentedly depicted on the stage, but Gorky's basic concept—the clash between the advanced, life-asserting world outlook and the musty, bestial world of the philistines was not revealed.

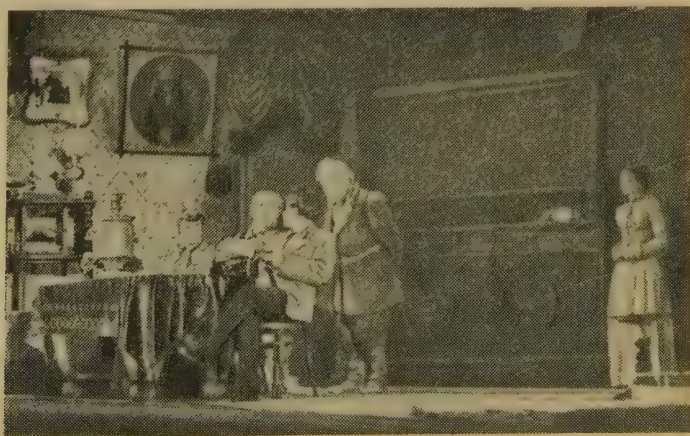
After the October Revolution, *The Philistines* won a permanent place in the repertoire of Soviet theatres. The most interesting production of this play before the war was presented

by E. Telesheva in the Central Red Army Theatre in 1935.

The new production of *The Philistines* in the Maly Theatre is by Alexei Diky, a director of sharp and expressive theatrical forms. He has based his production on Gorky's words: "...around and amongst us bubbles the vexed world of the philistines..." the theatre exposes to the onlooker the hideous essence of the philistine, it must arouse contempt and disgust of the latter..."

Both in the treatment of the main characters and in the development of the action one feels the burning hatred for the stupidity and inertness of the philistine world. The atmosphere of the Besemenov's home suffocates everything living, everything that does not conform to the stagnant, moss-grown dogmas of the "foremen of the paint shop" and the master of his home and his children, old Besemenov. His catechism of life is a simple one: man lives to make money, to spend it sparingly, to beget children who must live as their grandfathers and fathers lived. But life does not wish to adapt itself to these moulds. Not only beyond the walls of Besemenov's house, but also inside this fusty dwelling, where the furniture is heavy and lasting and life stagnates, everything reverberates to the distant, alarming rolls of the coming thunderstorms.

Everything is upset: for participation in the student revolts Peter, the son and heir of his father's hopes, is expelled from the university; Tatyana, the daughter, attempts to commit suicide; and the adopted son Nil leaves home. All the four acts of the play take place in this pent atmosphere. Perhaps the director has allowed himself to be influenced too far by the satirical, accusing elements in Gorky's play. But therefore, the figures of the negative characters, the representatives of the self-seeking, stupid world of the philistines, are vivid and true to life. A strong and inspired portrayal of the old Besemenov is given by the actor Kovrov. The playgoers see a clever and tenacious despot who searches with much passion and mental suffering for support of the world he loves in his children. Orlova in the role of Besemenov's wife Akulina Ivanovna has created the figure of a stupid, weak-willed woman who watches in



The Philistines, staged by the Maly Theatre

dumb despair as everything customary, firm and understandable, falls to pieces before her eyes. A talented portrayal of the son Peter, a philistine of the new type, an eloquent talker but a coward, is given by the actor Afanasyev. The decadent hopelessness of a desolate soul, despairing at its own uselessness, is cleverly depicted by the actress K. Tarasova in the role of Tatyana.

In Gorky's play the enemies of philistinism are represented by the idealist and visionary, the fowler Perchikhin, one of the prototypes of Luka from *The Lower Depths*; the declassed rebel, longing for justice, the church singer Teterev; the "merry widow" Elena, and, first and foremost, the locomotive engineer Nil, the first portrayal of a class-conscious worker on the Russian stage.

Unfortunately, in the Maly Theatre production these figures are not sufficiently colourfully and convincingly presented; therefore the performance loses some of its depth of principle and becomes a series of vivid, satirical pictures from the life of the Russian middle classes of the beginning of the 20th century.

In contrast to *The Philistines*, Gorky's play *The Old Man*, written in 1915, has practically no stage history and is generally little known. This is a philosophical drama in which humanism is opposed to "the joy of tormenting", and it continues in play form Gorky's controversy with Dostoyevsky, begun not long before in a number of publicist articles. In the introduction to the American edition of *The Old Man* (1922), Gorky wrote: "In 'The Old Man' I tried to show how repulsive a human being becomes when he is engrossed in his own sufferings and comes to believe that he has the right to make others suffer for his own pain. If such an individual has convinced himself that such is his right, that he is a chosen medium of vengeance, he loses all right to human respect. . . The theory of "saving the soul" through suffering was popular in Russia. I say *was* because I believe that Russia has endured sufficient misery to have arrived at an implacable hatred for them. . . ."

After thirty-odd years of its existence, the Kamerny Theatre is only staging its second

Gorky play. The production of *Children of the Sun* in the thirties, helped the theatre to find the realistic depth of dramatic representation, taught it how to enter the spiritual world of its heroes. Just as important for the creative career of this theatre is the present production of *The Old Man*.

The conflict between the Old Man and Mastakov is the central theme of the drama. The Old Man, or Anton, or Pitirim, spends seven years in searching for his old comrade Gusev and finally finds him under the name of Mastakov. Once they had both been in prison together: the Old Man for the rape of a young girl, Mastakov for accidentally killing a man in a drunken brawl. Mastakov escaped from prison, the Old Man served his sentence.

In possession of Mastakov's secret, the Old Man enters his house and threatens his happiness and peace-of-mind. After escaping from prison, Mastakov had made good use of his time. He is now a merchant, owns his own houses, has just finished building a school, and is about to begin a new undertaking. He has children and is thinking of marrying the woman who has helped him much in life. Mastakov is prepared to pay the Old Man for his silence, but the latter is not a mere blackmailer, he has a different aim, he wants moral not material satisfaction. The Old Man thirsts for Mastakov's ruin, for the collapse of his entire life structure built up with so much care, he wants to drag Mastakov down to his own level. That is the retribution, the price of silence. Mastakov commits suicide without waiting for "the sentence."

The Old Man thinks that his sufferings place him above others. He is the "master, the artist of suffering". The constructive strength of labour which has raised Mastakov is set off by the playwright against the destructive, negative strength of suffering.

The complicated concept of this play, its philosophical, acutely polemic nature, present great difficulties for the producer. An indisputable achievement of the Kamerny Theatre's production is the correct conception of the entire idea of the play. The role of the Old Man is given an interesting interpretation by Gaideburov. His Old Man is clever and



The Old Man, staged by the Moscow Kamerny Theatre

wicked, cunning and bold, his sadism holds a certain voluptuousness, to torment is the only pleasure left in his life. Varvara Belenkaya gives a very successful rendering of the role of the Maiden. The immobile stony face, the fixed and seemingly empty eyes absolutely correspond to the description of this character given by Gorky in his author's notes.

Such were the two Gorky jubilee performances.

The Ermolova Theatre's new production *Far From Stalingrad* is regarded by critics as an outstanding event in Moscow theatrical life.

The action of the play unfolds in 1942, in a small town in the Urals. An aviation factory from the Ukraine has been leapfrogged to this town. The plant is manned by old men, women and young people. The plant overfulfills its program, it seems that everything possible is being done to help the front. Meanwhile the Germans continue to advance, the great battles for Stalingrad rage. More and more trainloads of peaceful citizens, driven from their homes by the fascists, arrive in the town, which is overcrowded. The plant needs engineers, technicians, skilled workers, but there is no housing accommodation for them. True, the plant is overfulfilling its plan as it is, maybe it could do without these new people, without radically changing its work. The evacuated engineer Berezin proposes to introduce the chain production which would double the output. But this entails a certain risk, a complete stoppage of the plant for two months.

The play centres around the Party organizer Orlov. He has devoted himself to that which forms the basis of political work in industry: he is a searcher for hidden possibilities, a fighter for a revolutionary, creative attitude towards their work in all the people surrounding him. Orlov is opposed by the self-satisfied, by persons suffering from "fatty degeneration of the conscience." Orlov gathers the leading people around him: the engineer Berezin, author of the plan of transition to the chain production, the girl journalist Volina, the old worker Mikheev. Gradually, Orlov wins over the director of the plant Osередko. The chief opponent of the new line is Krasavin, member of the bureau of



The Old Man, staged by the Moscow Kamerny Theatre

the City Party Committee. Self-confident to the point of insolence, Krasavin argues and condemns, but in reality he is a coward and fears the least danger to his own personal comfort.

Far From Stalingrad is the first play of the young playwright Anatoli Surov. It deals with passion with the immediate problems of the day. The Ermolova Theatre deserves much credit for its production. The directors Andrei Lobanov and Victor Komissarzhevsky have succeeded in creating vivid images of our contemporaries with the help



Far from Stalingrad, staged by Ermolova Theatre



Tap dancers from An Ordinary Concert, staged by the Puppet Theatre

of the actors I. Solovyev, E. Kirilova, L. Gallis, and others. Political understanding, keenness of ideas, sharp observations of reality ensure this play a deserved success.

The theatrical season includes another interesting novelty, which bears the modest title of *An Ordinary Concert*. This "Concert" is presented by Sergei Obraztsov's Puppet Theatre. Obraztsov conceived the idea of this "concert" some ten years ago, the preparations for the performance took two years! What is this idea and why is this concert so immensely popular with Moscovites? In his new work, Obraztsov parodies the ordinary variety concerts of which a large number are given every year. He takes up arms against the variety standards, against the dead "traditions", so destructive to real art.

In the *Ordinary Concert* everything is truly ordinary—the stale jokes of the comic; the lyric soprano and the baritone sing popular arias and ballads; tap dancers perform the "dances of the world"; the Gypsy chorus of the "Trans-Polar Philharmonic" render

"Gypsy melodies" and dances that the audience are long tired of hearing; the jazz, in imitation of the style of Western-European restaurants, plays "languishing" tangos and blues; a beautiful musical comedy diva with her elegant "frock-coated" partner twists and turns in a pot-pourri of all Kalman's best-known operettas; a singing capella rends the ear with wild "polyphonic" galimatias, and so forth.

An inexpressibly comical effect is obtained in the first place by the fact that everything is performed in all seriousness, with strict adherence to the traditions of the variety stage, but that the players are wooden puppets, made with remarkable skill. For this "concert" Obraztsov's theatre created an entire gallery of variety stars, whose typical features have been caught with amazing exactitude; in the skilled hands of Obraztsov's actors these "personages" become living beings. The onlooker forgets that he is watching puppets and for a moment thinks that he is at a real concert. However, Obraztsov's aim is not only to create the illusion of reality. This performance is not only an amusement, its aim is not only to entertain the public. Obraztsov's comedy contains a serious satire which lashes all things inert, backward and tasteless in art. In this lies the great social meaning of the *Ordinary Concert*.

The Soviet variety stage has many clever, tactful comics but there are still some who deal out ancient, moth-eaten anecdotes. They should be removed from the variety stage, declares the *Ordinary Concert*.

The Soviet variety stage has many talented young singers and dancers. But at some concerts you will hear voiceless baritones like the one who renders Figaro's aria on Obraztsov's stage. They must be removed from the variety stage! demands the *Ordinary Concert*. And so on, and so forth. "It is no sin to laugh at what is comical"—says the Russian proverb which does not accidentally serve as the epigraph for the whole of the *Ordinary Concert*. Every number of Obraztsov's



Chorus from An Ordinary Concert staged by the Puppet Theatre

concert contains a satirical accusation, a parodied exaggeration, every one of Obraztsov's dolls scores a sharp hit at its chosen goal, and therefore, the laughter does not die down in the hall.

The first night of the *Ordinary Concert* coincided happily with the review of variety art now being held throughout the Soviet Union. Such reviews are held frequently. They demonstrate the successes of the variety stage, present an opportunity to young talent to show itself, and make it possible to discover the shortcomings in variety repertoires. The present review, consisting of three rounds, is of great interest. The contest has brought out many excellent actors who will reinforce the ranks of Soviet variety performers. At the same time, it has revealed many shortcomings, which are now being discussed at conferences of art workers, and in the special press.

The Ukrainian State Hutzul Song and Dance Ensemble gave a number of concerts in Moscow this summer. This ensemble is still quite a young one, having been formed only one year ago in the Stanislavov Philharmonic.

Up till 1939, while Stanislavov was Polish territory, the recording of Hutzul songs and melodies was punishable as a crime against the state. After the reunion of all Ukrainian lands, Hutzul art commenced to develop rapidly. It is sufficient once to see the famous Hutzul embroideries, paintings, wood carvings, to hear the folk songs and witness the national dances in the Hutzul villages in order to remember this merry, talented people forever.

The Hutzul ensemble brought many beautiful songs to Moscow. The chorus of the ensemble consists of 45 persons, chiefly peasants from Carpathian villages. The art director Dmitri Kotko chose his artists one by one in the various villages and towns of the Hutzul region. In the same way, he selected the 25 dancers headed by the talented Yaraslav Chuperchuk.

The ensemble is accompanied by a small orchestra consisting of three violins, a viola, a violoncello, a contrabass, a sort of reed-pipe, Turkish drum and chormatic cymbals.

IN LENINGRAD

A contest of young conductors has just ended in Leningrad.

Over 40 young musicians took part in the contest which lasted for almost one month and consisted of two rounds. In the first round, each participant conducted a three-hours' rehearsal of the Leningrad State Philharmonic Orchestra at which Chaikovsky's overture-phantasy to *Romeo and Juliet* was studied and rehearsed. Out of the 40 competitors five were chosen for the last round, in which each had to conduct a concert independently. The repertoires of these concerts varied widely, including Beethoven's fifth symphony, the extremely difficult fourth symphony of Bruckner, Chaikovsky's fourth and fifth symphonies, and so on.

The first prize (10,000 rubles) was awarded to K. Semenov, conductor of the Kiev State Theatre of Opera and Ballet, a graduate of the Leningrad conservatory. The second prizes were won by R. Matson of Tallinn and A. Jansons of Riga. Finally, the two fourth prizes were awarded to 28-year-old I. Gusman of Chernovitzky and the Baku opera conductor Niyazi Tagi-Zade. Seven other competitors received honorary certificates, and three were commended for their merited performances.

A review of amateur art ensembles is held in Leningrad every year. A great deal of work is systematically carried out with these ensembles by the Leningrad House of Popular Art, which sends talented directors to guide the work of the amateur art circles in factories and institutions. These circles consist of workers and employees who are interested in any form of art, from artistic embroidery to symphony concerts.

Three months before the review was held, experts in all the fields of art made a careful study of the work of some 10,000 amateur artists. Even in the last third round of the contest, for which the best performers had been carefully selected, some 1,000 persons took part. This first post-war contest of amateur artists of the city of Lenin revealed many vivid talents.

CINEMA

DOCUMENTARY FILM ON MAXIM GORKY

A new film about Maxim Gorky was shown on all Soviet screens in honour of the Gorky anniversary. The script comes from the pen of the Soviet writer Lev Nikulin; Samuil Bubrik directed the picture and the photography is by newsreel cameraman Arkadi Shafran.

The film depicts the life of the writer—broad and majestic, simple and great as the Volga near Nizhny where he was born and grew up. Here is the one-storied wooden house described by Gorky in *Childhood*. Here his own childhood days were passed. From here he entered the world to search for happiness and a brighter lot.

The camera leads us down the roads and paths travelled by Gorky during his "wanderings through Russia." We see the most important episodes in his life; the authors of the film having made skilled use of documentary news chronicles, old photographs and new pictures of places connected with Gorky's life. Scenes from his plays, *The Lower Depths*, *Enemies*, *Dostigayev* and *Others*, as staged by the Moscow Art Theatre, have been successfully inserted into the picture. They introduce the onlooker into the world of Gorky's characters, create a true sense of the epoch.

Of historical value are the scenes from old newsreels depicting Maxim Gorky's arrival in Moscow in 1928. At that time there were no talkies yet, and we do not hear the writer's words addressed to the thousands who thronged to meet him. But even these "si-

lent" scenes convey with great strength the significance of this stirring meeting both for Gorky and his readers, the new people, builders of the socialist society.

A few years later, Gorky again returns home from Italy, this time for good. The train approaches Negoreloye. The cameramen, now already armed with microphones, succeeded in recording the conversation, wonderfully moving in its directness, which took place between Gorky and the border guards from the windows of the writer's carriage.

In those years Gorky made his long-planned journey through the Soviet Union. He was passionately eager to see the places through which he had walked on foot thirty years ago, to see how they had changed, to shake hands with the new, Soviet people.

And the filmgoer sees Maxim Gorky at the construction site of the Dnieper power station, in the Gigant state farm, on the Balhash ore fields, in a Red Army camp, at a Young Pioneers' Meet, at youth sports meets.

In 1934, the first congress of Soviet writers took place in Moscow. The film shows Gorky on the tribune of the congress. We hear his voice again and his words, full of belief in the future of Soviet literature, in the inexhaustible creative strength of the Soviet people.

With particular emotion the audience sees Gorky's house on Malaya Nikitskaya Street in Moscow, where he spent the last years of his life, and the scenes of the film showing Gorky together with Stalin at celebrations on the Red Square.

And then the Red Square in June 1936: in silent grief, Stalin, the leaders of the Party and the Government, stand on the tribune of the mausoleum: Moscow, the Soviet people are bidding farewell to their Gorky.

The film has preserved the living figure and ringing words of Maxim Gorky for us and for posterity.

MISCELLANEOUS

STAMPS DEDICATED TO MAXIM GORKY

Not a few stamps amongst those dedicated to prominent Soviet people perpetuate the memory of Maxim Gorky. In 1932, on the 40th anniversary of Gorky's literary activities, two stamps (15 and 35 kopeks) bearing the portrait of the great writer were issued.

Both these stamps have perforated edges. The first also exists with unperforated edges, but was issued in a limited edition and is, therefore, particularly valued by collectors.

In March 1943, during the great battles of the Patriotic War, the 75th anniversary of Gorky's birthday was marked by the issue of two postage stamps of 30 and 60 kopeks value. These stamps bear the portrait of the writer in a square frame, against the background of a stormy sea over which a storm-petrel hovers, symbol of Gorky's poem of that name.

In commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the great writer's death, the Ministry of Communications issued two new postage stamps, to the value of 30 and 60 kopeks, in brown and green colours. They bear two different portraits of Gorky. The 30-kopek stamp has the writer's words "Proud sounds the name of man" engraved on a circular medallion surrounded by a laurel wreath. Both stamps bear the date of his death—1936—and the date of issue—1946.

The design for the new stamps is by the artist Dubasov.



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